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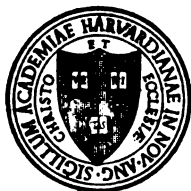
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**THE COUNTRY DOCTOR  
THE COMMISSION IN LUNACY  
THE ATHEIST'S MASS**



THE COUNTRY DOCTOR  
THE COMMISSION IN LUNACY  
THE ATHEIST'S MASS









"WELL, WHAT IS IT?" BENAS IS ASKED.



The novels of Balzac.

H. DE BALZAC

---

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR  
THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED BY

ELLEN MARRIAGE

WITH PREFACES BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY



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# CONTENTS

## VOLUME I.

	PAGE
<i>PREFACE</i> . . . . .	ix
<i>THE COUNTRY DOCTOR</i>	
I. THE COUNTRYSIDE AND THE MAN . . . . .	I
II. A DOCTOR'S ROUND . . . . .	77
III. THE NAPOLEON OF THE PEOPLE . . . . .	146
IV. THE COUNTRY DOCTOR'S CONFESSION . . . . .	202
V. ELEGIES . . . . .	247
<i>THE COMMISSION IN LUNACY</i> . . . . .	283
<i>THE ATHEIST'S MASS</i> . . . . .	366

## VOLUME II.

<i>PREFACE</i> . . . . .	ix
<i>THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE</i> . . . . .	I
<i>THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE</i>	
I. GILLETTE . . . . .	223
II. CATHERINE LESCAULT . . . . .	244
> <i>CHRIST IN FLANDERS</i> . . . . .	255
<i>MELMOTH RECONCILED</i> . . . . .	271
<i>THE RED HOUSE</i> . . . . .	331
I. THE IDEA AND THE DEED . . . . .	335
II. THE DOUBLE RETRIBUTION . . . . .	359



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## VOLUME I.

"WELL, WHAT IS IT?" BENASSIS ASKED . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"M. BENASSIS WENT OVER THERE" . . . . .	PAGE 19
AN OLD LABORER MAKING HIS WAY ALONG THE ROAD, IN COMPANY WITH AN AGED WOMAN . . . . .	99
THE MAN OF WHOM HE WAS IN SEARCH SOON APPEARED ON THE TOP OF A PERPENDICULAR CRAG . . . . .	139
I TOOK HER UP BEHIND ME IN THE SADDLE . . . . .	255
<i>Drawn by W. Boucher.</i>	

## VOLUME II.

HE TOOK UP MME. CLAËS AT ONCE IN HIS ARMS — AND SPRANG UP THE STAIRCASE . . . . .	54
SHE TURNED, WITH A SWAN-LIKE MOVEMENT OF HER THROAT, TO GLANCE ONCE MORE AT EMMANUEL . . . . .	105
THE OLDER MAN — KNOCKED THRICE AT THE DOOR . . . . .	225
THE FORGER SAW A MAN STANDING AT THE LITTLE GRATED WINDOW . . . . .	282
<i>Drawn by W. Boucher.</i>	





## PREFACE.

IN hardly any of his books, with the possible exception of "Eugénie Grandet," does Balzac seem to have taken a greater interest than in "The Country Doctor;" and the fact of this interest, together with the merit and intensity of the book in each case, is, let it be repeated, a valid argument against those who would have it that there was something essentially sinister both in his genius and in his character.

"The Country Doctor" was an early book; it was published in 1833, a date of which there is an interesting mark in the selection of the name "Evelina," the name of Madame Hanska, whom Balzac had just met, for the lost Jansenist love of Benassis; and it had been on the stocks for a considerable time. It is also noteworthy, as lying almost entirely outside the general scheme of the "Comédie Humaine" as far as personages go. Its chief characters in the remarkable, if not absolutely impeccable, *répertoire* of MM. Cerfberr and Christophe (they have, a rare thing with them, missed Agathe the forsaken mistress) have no references appended to their articles, except to the book itself; and I cannot remember that any of the more generally pervading *dramatis personæ* of the Comedy makes even an incidental appearance here. The book is as isolated as its scene and subject—I might have added, as its own beauty, which is singular and unique, nor wholly easy to give a critical account of. The minor characters and episodes, with the exception of the wonderful story or legend of Napoleon by Private Goguelat, and the private himself, are neither of the first interest, nor always carefully

(ix)

worked out: La Fosseuse, for instance, is a very tantalizingly unfinished study, of which it is nearly certain that Balzac must at some time or other have meant to make much more than he has made; Genestas, excellent as far as he goes, is not much more than a type; and there is nobody else in the foreground at all except Benassis himself.

It is, however, beyond all doubt in the very subordination of these other characters to Benassis, and in the skilful grouping of the whole as background and adjunct to him, that the appeal of the book as art consists. From that point of view there are grounds for regarding it as the finest of the author's work in the simple style, the least indebted to superadded ornament or to mere variety. The dangerous expedient of a *récit*, of which the eighteenth-century novelists were so fond, has never been employed with more successful effect than in the confession of Benassis, at once the climax and the centre of the story. And one thing which strikes us immediately about this confession is the universality of its humanity and its strange freedom from merely national limitations. To very few French novelists—to few even of those who are generally credited with a much softer mould and a much purer morality than Balzac is popularly supposed to have been able to boast—would inconstancy to a mistress have seemed a fault which could be reasonably punished, which could be even reasonably represented as having been punished, in fact, by the refusal of an honest girl's love in the first place. Nor would many have conceived as possible, or have been able to represent in life-like colors, the lifelong penance which Benassis imposes on himself. The tragic end, indeed, is more in their general way, but they would seldom have known how to lead up to it.

In almost all ways Balzac has saved himself from the dangers incident to his plan in this book after a rather miraculous fashion. The Goguelat myth may seem disconnected, and he did as a matter of fact once publish it separately; yet it sets off (in the same sort of felicitous manner of which Shake-

spere's clown-scenes and others are the capital examples in literature) both the slightly matter-of-fact details of the beatification of the valley and the various minute sketches of places and folk, and the almost superhuman goodness of Benassis, and his intensely and piteously human suffering and remorse. It is like the red cloak in a group; it lights, warms, inspirits the whole picture.

And perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is the way in which Balzac in this story, so full of goodness of feeling, of true religion (for if Benassis is not an ostensible practiser of religious rites, he avows his orthodoxy in theory, and more than justifies it in practice), has almost entirely escaped the sentimentality *plus* unorthodoxy of similar work in the eighteenth century, and the sentimentality *plus* orthodoxy of similar work in the nineteenth. Benassis no doubt plays Providence in a manner and with a success which it is rarely given to mortal man to achieve; but we do not feel either the approach to sham, or the more than approach to gush, with which similar handling on the part of Dickens too often affects some of us. The sin and the punishment of Benassis, the thoroughly human figures of Genestas and the rest, save the situation from this and other drawbacks. We are not in the Cockaigne of perfectibility, where Marmontel and Godwin disport themselves; we are in a very practical place, where time-bargains in barley are made, and you pay the respectable, if not lavish, board of ten francs per day for entertainment to man and beast.

And yet, explain as we will, there will always remain something inexplicable in the appeal of such a book as "The Country Doctor." This helps, and that, and the other; we can see what change might have damaged the effect, and what have endangered it altogether. We must, of course, acknowledge that as it is there are *longueurs* (tedious stretches), intrusions of Saint Simonian jargon, passages of *galimatias* (nonsense) and of preaching. But of what in strictness produces the good

effect we can only say one thing, and that is, it was the genius of Balzac working as it listed and as it knew how to work.

The book was originally published by Mme. Delaunay in September, 1833, in two volumes and thirty-six chapters with headings. Next year it was republished in four volumes by Werdet, and the last fifteen chapters were thrown together into four. In 1836 it reappeared with dedication and date, but with the divisions further reduced to seven; being those which here appear, with the addition of two, "La Fosseuse" and "Propos de Braves Gens," between "A Travers Champs" and "Le Napoléon du Peuple." These two were removed in 1839, when it was published in a single volume by Charpentier. In all these issues the book was independent. It became a "Scène de la Vie de Campagne" in 1846, and was then admitted into the "Comédie." The separate issues of Goguelat's story referred to above made their appearance first in *L'Europe Littéraire* for June 19, 1833 (*before* the book form), and then with the imprint of a sort of syndicate of publishers in 1842.

Of the two short stories, "The Atheist's Mass" is the greatest. Its extreme brevity makes it almost impossible for the author to indulge in those digressions from which he never could entirely free himself when he allowed himself much room. We do not hear more of the inward character of Desplein than is necessary to make us appreciate the touching history which is the centre of the anecdote; the thing in general could not be presented at greater advantage than it is. Nor in itself could it be much, if at all, better. As usual, it is more or less of a personal confession. Balzac, it must always be remembered, was himself pretty definitely "on the side of the angels." As a Frenchman, as a man with a strong eighteenth-century tincture in him, as a student of Rabelais, as one not too much given to regard nature and fate through rose-colored spectacles, as a product of more or less godless education (for his schooldays came before the neo-Catholic

revival), and in many other ways, he was not exactly an orthodox person. But he had no ideas foreign to orthodoxy; and neither in his novels, nor in his letters, nor elsewhere, would it be possible to find a private expression of unbelief. And such a story as this is worth a bookseller's storehouse full of tracts, coming as it does from Honoré de Balzac.

"The Commission in Lunacy" is sufficiently different, but it is almost equally good in its own way. It is indeed impossible to say that there is not in the manner, though perhaps there may be none in the fact, of the Marquis d'Espard's restitution and the rest of it a little touch of the madder side of Quixotism; and one sees all the speculative and planning Balzac in that notable scheme of the great work on China, which brought in far, far more, I fear, than any work on China ever has or is likely to bring in to its devisers. But the conduct of Popinot in his interview with the Marquis is really admirable. The great scenes of fictitious  *finesse*  do not always "come off;" we do not invariably find ourselves experiencing that sense of the ability of the characters which the novelist appears to entertain, and expects us to entertain likewise. But this is admirable; it is, with Bernard's "Le Gendre," perhaps the very best thing of the kind to be found anywhere. These two stories, "The Commission in Lunacy" and "The Atheist's Mass," would, if they existed entirely by themselves, and if we knew nothing of their author, nor anything about him, suffice to show any intelligent critic that genius of no ordinary kind had passed by there.

G. S.



## THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

," For a wounded heart—shadow and silence."

*To my Mother.*

### I.

#### THE COUNTRYSIDE AND THE MAN.

ON a lovely spring morning in the year 1829, a man of fifty or thereabouts was wending his way on horseback along the mountain road that leads to a large village near the Grande Chartreuse. This village is the market-town of a populous canton that lies within the limits of a valley of some considerable length. The melting of the snows had filled the boulder-strewn bed of the torrent (often dry) that flows through this valley, which is closely shut in between two parallel mountain barriers, above which the peaks of Savoy and of Dauphiné tower on every side.

All the scenery of the country that lies between the chain of the two Mauriennes is very much alike; yet here in the district through which the stranger was traveling there are soft undulations of the land, and varying effects of light which might be sought for elsewhere in vain. Sometimes the valley, suddenly widening, spreads out a soft irregularly-shaped carpet of grass before the eyes; a meadow constantly watered by the mountain streams, that keep it fresh and green at all seasons of the year. Sometimes a roughly-built sawmill appears in a picturesque position, with its stacks of long pine trunks with the bark peeled off, and its mill stream, brought from the bed of the torrent in great square wooden pipes, with masses of dripping filament issuing from every crack. Little

(1)



cottages, scattered here and there, with their gardens full of blossoming fruit trees, call up the ideas that are aroused by the sight of industrious poverty; while the thought of ease, secured after long years of toil, is suggested by some larger houses farther on, with their red roofs of flat round tiles, shaped like the scales of a fish. There is no door, moreover, that does not duly exhibit a basket in which the cheeses are hung up to dry. Every roadside and every croft is adorned with vines; which here, as in Italy, they train to grow about dwarf elm trees, whose leaves are stripped off to feed the cattle.

Nature, in her caprice, has brought the sloping hills on either side so near together in some places that there is no room for fields, or buildings, or peasants' huts. Nothing lies between them but the torrent, roaring over its waterfalls between two lofty walls of granite that rise above it, their sides covered with the leafage of tall beeches and dark fir trees to the height of a hundred feet. The trees, with their different kinds of foliage, rise up straight and tall, fantastically colored by patches of lichen, forming magnificent colonnades, with a line of straggling hedgerow of guelder rose, briar rose, box and arbutus above and below the roadway at their feet. The subtle perfume of this undergrowth was mingled just then with scents from the wild mountain region and with the aromatic fragrance of young larch shoots, budding poplars, and resinous pines.

Here and there a wreath of mist about the heights sometimes hid and sometimes gave glimpses of the gray crags, that seemed as dim and vague as the soft flecks of cloud dispersed among them. The whole face of the country changed every moment with the changing light in the sky; the hues of the mountains, the soft shades of their lower slopes, the very shape of the valleys seemed to vary continually. A ray of sunlight through the tree stems, a clear space made by nature in the woods, or a landslip here and there, coming as a sur-

prise to make a contrast in the foreground, made up an endless series of pictures delightful to see amid the silence, at the time of year when all things grow young, and when the sun fills a cloudless heaven with a blaze of light. In short, it was a fair land—it was the land of France!

The traveler was a tall man, dressed from head to foot in a suit of blue cloth, which must have been brushed just as carefully every morning as the glossy coat of his horse. He held himself firm and erect in the saddle like an old cavalry officer. Even if his black cravat and doeskin gloves, the pistols that filled his holsters, and the valise securely fastened to the crupper behind him had not combined to mark him out as a soldier, the air of unconcern that sat on his face, his regular features (scarred though they were with the smallpox), his determined manner, self-reliant expression, and the way he held his head, all revealed the habits acquired through military discipline, of which a soldier can never quite divest himself, even after he has retired from service into private life.

Any other traveler would have been filled with wonder at the loveliness of this Alpine region, which grows so bright and smiling as it becomes merged in the great valley systems of southern France; but the officer, who no doubt had previously traversed a country across which the French armies had been drafted in the course of Napoleon's wars, enjoyed the view before him without appearing to be surprised by the many changes that swept across it. It would seem that Napoleon has extinguished in his soldiers the sensation of wonder; for an impassive face is a sure token by which you may know the men who served erewhile under the short-lived yet deathless eagles of the great Emperor. The traveler was, in fact, one of those soldiers (seldom met with nowadays) whom shot and shell have respected, although they have borne their part on every battlefield where Napoleon commanded.

There had been nothing unusual in his life. He had fought

valiantly in the ranks as a simple and loyal soldier, doing his duty as faithfully by night as by day, and whether in or out of his officer's sight. He had never dealt a sabre stroke in vain, and was incapable of giving one too many. If he wore at his buttonhole the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor, it was because the unanimous voice of his regiment had singled him out as the man who best deserved to receive it after the battle of Borodino.

He belonged to that small minority of undemonstrative retiring natures, who are always at peace with themselves, and who are conscious of a feeling of humiliation at the mere thought of making a request, no matter what its nature may be. So promotion had come to him tardily, and by virtue of the slowly-working laws of seniority. He had been made a sub-lieutenant in 1802, but it was not until 1829 that he became a major, in spite of the grayness of his mustaches. His life had been so blameless that no man in the army, not even the general himself, could approach him without an involuntary feeling of respect. It is possible that he was not forgiven for this indisputable superiority by those who ranked above him; but, on the other hand, there was not one of his men that did not feel for him something of the affection of children for a good mother. For them he knew how to be at once indulgent and severe. He himself had also once served in the ranks, and knew the sorry joys and gaily-endured hardships of the soldier's lot. He knew the errors that may be passed over and the faults that must be punished in his men—"his children," as he always called them—and when on campaign he readily gave them leave to forage for provisions for man or horse among the wealthier classes.

His own personal history lay buried beneath the deepest reserve. Like almost every military man in Europe, he had only seen the world through cannon smoke, or in the brief intervals of peace that occurred so seldom during the Emperor's continual wars with the rest of Europe. Had he or

had he not thought of marriage? The question remained unsettled. Although no one doubted that Commandant Genestas had made conquests during his sojourn in town after town and country after country where he had taken part in the festivities given and received by the officers, yet no one knew this for a certainty. There was no prudery about him; he would not decline to join a pleasure party; he in no way offended against military standards; but when questioned as to his affairs of the heart, he either kept silence or answered with a jest. To the words, "How about you, commandant?" addressed to him by an officer over the wine, his reply was, "Pass the bottle, gentlemen."

M. Pierre Joseph Genestas was an unostentatious kind of Bayard. There was nothing romantic nor picturesque about him—he was too thoroughly commonplace. His ways of living were those of a well-to-do man. Although he had nothing beside his pay, and his pension was all that he had to look to in the future, the major always kept two years' pay untouched, and never spent his allowances, like some shrewd old men of business with whom cautious prudence has almost become a mania. He was so little of a gambler that if, when in company, some one was wanted to cut in or take a bet at *écarté*, he usually fixed his eyes on his boots; but though he did not allow himself any extravagances, he conformed in every way to custom.

His uniforms lasted longer than those of any other officer in his regiment, as a consequence of the sedulously careful habits that somewhat straitened means had so instilled into him, that they had come to be like a second nature. Perhaps he might have been suspected of meanness if it had not been for the fact that with wonderful disinterestedness and all a comrade's readiness, his purse would be opened for some harebrained boy who had ruined himself at cards or by some other folly. He did a service of this kind with such thoughtful tact, that it seemed as though he himself had at one time lost heavy

sums at play; he never considered that he had any right to control the actions of his debtor; he never made mention of the loan. He was the child of his company; he was alone in the world, so he had adopted the army for his fatherland, and the regiment for his family. Very rarely, therefore, did any one seek the motives underlying his praiseworthy turn for thrift; for it pleased others, for the most part, to set it down to a not unnatural wish to increase the amount of the savings that were to render his old age comfortable. Till the eve of his promotion to the rank of lieutenant-colonel of cavalry it was fair to suppose that it was his ambition to retire in the course of some campaign with a colonel's epaulettes and pension.

If Genestas' name came up when the officers gossiped after drill, they were wont to classify him among the men who begin with taking the good-conduct prize at school, and who, throughout the term of their natural lives, continue to be punctilious, conscientious and passionless—as good as white bread, and just as insipid. Thoughtful minds, however, regarded him very differently. Not seldom it would happen that a glance, or an expression as full of significance as the utterance of a savage, would drop from him and bear witness to past storms in his soul; and a careful study of his placid brow revealed a power of stifling down and repressing his passions into inner depths, that had been dearly bought by a lengthy acquaintance with the perils and disastrous hazards of war. An officer who had only just joined the regiment, the son of a peer of France, had said one day of Genestas that he would have made one of the most conscientious of priests or the most upright of tradesmen.

“Add, the least of a courtier among marquises,” put in Genestas, scanning the young puppy, who did not know that his commandant could overhear him.

There was a burst of laughter at the words, for the lieutenant's father cringed to all the powers that be; he was a

man of supple intellect, accustomed to jump with every change of government, and his son took after him.

Men like Genestas are met with now and again in the French army; natures that show themselves to be wholly great at need, and relapse into their ordinary simplicity when the action is over; men that are little mindful of fame and reputation, and utterly forgetful of danger. Perhaps there are many more of them than the shortcomings of our own characters will allow us to imagine. Yet, for all that, any one who believed that Genestas was perfect would be strangely deceiving himself. The major was suspicious, given to violent outbursts of anger, and apt to be tiresome in argument; he was full of national prejudices, and, above all things, would insist that he was in the right when he was, as a matter of fact, in the wrong. He retained the liking for good wine that he had acquired in the ranks. If he rose from a banquet with all the gravity befitting his position, he seemed serious and pensive, and had no mind at such times to admit any one into his confidence.

Finally, although he was sufficiently acquainted with the customs of society and with the laws of politeness, to which he conformed as rigidly as if they had been military regulations; though he had real mental power, both natural and acquired; and although he had mastered the art of handling men, the science of tactics, the theory of sabre play, and the mysteries of the farrier's craft, his learning had been prodigiously neglected. He knew in a hazy kind of way that Cæsar was a Roman consul, or an emperor, and that Alexander was either a Greek or a Macedonian; he would have conceded either quality or origin in both cases without discussion. If the conversation turned on science or history, he was wont to become thoughtful, and to confine his share in it to little approving nods, like a man who by dint of profound thought has arrived at scepticism.

When, at Schönbrunn, on May 13, 1809, Napoleon wrote

the bulletin addressed to the Grand Army, then the masters of Vienna, in which he said that *like Medea, the Austrian princes had slain their children with their own hands*; Genestas, who had been recently made a captain, did not wish to compromise his newly conferred dignity by asking who Medea was; he relied upon Napoleon's character, and felt quite sure that the Emperor was incapable of making any announcement not in proper form to the Grand Army and the House of Austria. So he thought that Medea was some archduchess whose conduct laid her open to criticism. Still, as the matter might have some bearing on the art of war, he felt uneasy about the Medea of the bulletin until a day arrived, when Mlle. Raucourt revived the tragedy of Medea. The captain saw the placard, and did not fail to repair to the Théâtre Français that evening, to see the celebrated actress in her mythological rôle, concerning which he gained some information from his neighbors.

A man, however, who as a private soldier had possessed sufficient force of character to learn to read, write, and cipher, could clearly understand that as a captain he ought to continue his education. So from this time forth he read new books and romances with avidity, in this way gaining a half-knowledge, of which he made a very fair use. He went so far in his gratitude to his teachers as to undertake the defence of Pigault-Lebrun, remarking that in his opinion he was instructive and not seldom profound.

This officer, whose acquired practical wisdom did not allow him to make any journey in vain, had just come from Grenoble, and was on his way to the Grande Chartreuse, after obtaining on the previous evening a week's leave of absence from his colonel. He had not expected that the journey would be a long one; but when, league after league, he had been misled as to the distance by the lying statements of the peasants, he thought it would be prudent not to venture any farther without fortifying the inner man. Small as were his

chances of finding any housewife in her dwelling at a time when every one was hard at work in the fields, he stopped before a little cluster of cottages that stood about a piece of land common to all of them, more or less describing a square, which was open to all comers.

The surface of the soil thus held in conjoint ownership was hard and carefully swept, but intersected by open drains. Roses, ivy, and tall grasses grew over the cracked and disjointed walls. Some rags were drying on a miserable currant bush that stood at the entrance of the square. A pig wallowing in a heap of straw was the first inhabitant encountered by Genestas. At the sound of horsehoofs the creature grunted, raised its head, and put a great black cat to flight. A young peasant girl, who was carrying a bundle of grass on her head, suddenly appeared, followed at a distance by four little brats, clad in rags, it is true, but vigorous, sunburned, picturesque, bold-eyed, and riotous; thorough little imps, looking like angels. The sun shone down with an indescribable purifying influence upon the air, the wretched cottages, the heaps of refuse, and the unkempt little crew.

The soldier asked whether it was possible to obtain a cup of milk. All the answer the girl made him was a hoarse cry. An old woman suddenly appeared on the threshold of one of the cabins, and the young peasant girl passed on into a cowshed, with a gesture that pointed out the aforesaid old woman, towards whom Genestas went; taking care at the same time to keep a tight hold on his horse, lest the children who already were running about under his hoofs should be hurt. He repeated his request, with which the housewife flatly refused to comply. She would not, she said, disturb the cream on the pans full of milk from which butter was to be made. The officer overcame this objection by undertaking to repay her amply for the wasted cream, and then tied up his horse at the door, and went inside the cottage.

The four children belonging to the woman all appeared to



be of the same age—an odd circumstance which struck the commandant. A fifth clung about her skirts ; a weak, pale, sickly-looking child, who doubtless needed more care than the others, and who on that account was the best beloved, the Benjamin of the family.

Genestas seated himself in a corner by the fireless hearth. A sublime symbol met his eyes on the high mantleshef above him—a colored plaster cast of the Virgin with the Child Jesus in her arms. Bare earth made the flooring of the cottage. It had been beaten level in the first instance, but in course of time it had grown rough and uneven, so that though it was clean, its ruggedness was not unlike that of the magnified rind of an orange. A sabot filled with salt, a frying-pan, and a large kettle hung inside the chimney. The farther end of the room was completely filled by a four-post bedstead, with a scalloped valance for decoration. The walls were black ; there was an opening to admit the light above the worm-eaten door ; and here and there were a few stools consisting of rough blocks of beechwood, each set upon three wooden legs ; a hutch for bread, a large wooden dipper, a bucket and some earthen milk-pans, a spinning-wheel on the top of the bread-hutch, and a few wicker mats for draining cheeses. Such were the ornaments and household furniture of the wretched dwelling.

The officer, who had been absorbed in flicking his riding-whip against the floor, presently became a witness to a piece of by-play, all unsuspecting though he was that any drama was about to unfold itself. No sooner had the old woman, followed by her scald-headed Benjamin, disappeared through a door that led into her dairy, than the four children, after having stared at the soldier as long as they wished, drove away the pig by way of a beginning. This animal, their accustomed playmate, having come as far as the threshold, the little brats made such an energetic attack upon him that he was forced to beat a hasty retreat. When the enemy had

been driven without, the children besieged the latch of a door that gave away before their united efforts, and slipped out of the worn staple that held it; and finally they bolted into a kind of fruit-loft, where they very soon fell to munching the dried plums, to the amusement of the commandant, who watched this spectacle. The old woman, with the face like parchment and the dirty ragged clothing, came back at this moment, with a jug of milk for her visitor in her hand.

"Oh! you good-for-nothings!" cried she.

She ran to the children, clutched an arm of each child, bundled them into the room, and carefully closed the door of her storehouse of plenty. But she did not take their prunes away from them.

"Now, then, be good, my pets! If one did not look after them," she went on, looking at Genestas, "they would eat up the whole lot of prunes, the madcaps!"

Then she seated herself on a three-legged stool, drew the little weakling between her knees, and began to comb and wash his head with a woman's skill and with motherly assiduity. The four small thieves hung about. Some of them stood, others leaned against the bed or the bread-hutch. They gnawed their prunes without saying a word, but they kept their sly and mischievous eyes fixed upon the stranger. In spite of grimy countenances and noses that stood in need of wiping, they all looked strong and healthy.

"Are they your children?" the soldier asked the old woman.

"Asking your pardon, sir, they are charity-children. They give me three francs a month and a pound's weight of soap for each of them."

"But it must cost you twice as much as that to keep them, good woman?"

"That is just what M. Benassis tells me, sir; but if other folk will board the children for the same money, one has to make it do. Nobody wants the children, but for all that

there is a good deal of performance to go through before they will let us have them. When the milk we give them comes to nothing, they cost us scarcely anything. Besides that, three francs is a great deal, sir; there are fifteen francs coming in, to say nothing of the five pounds' weight of soap. In our part of the world you would simply have to wear your life out before you would make ten sous a day," responded the good woman.

"Then you have some land of your own?" asked the commandant.

"No, sir. I had some land once when my husband was alive; since he died I have done so badly that I had to sell it."

"Why, how do you reach the year's end without debts?" Genestas went on, "when you bring up children for a livelihood and wash and feed them on two sous a day?"

"Well, we never get to St. Sylvester's Day without debt, sir." She went on without ceasing to comb the child's hair. "But so it is—Providence helps us out. I have a couple of cows. Then my daughter and I do some gleanings at harvest-time, and in winter we pick up firewood. Then at night we spin. Ah! we never want to see another winter like this last one, that is certain! I owe the miller seventy-five francs for flour. Luckily he is M. Benassis' miller. M. Benassis, ah! he is a friend to poor people. He has never asked for his due from anybody, and he will not begin with us. Besides, our cow has a calf, and that will set us a bit straighter."

The four orphans for whom the old woman's affection represented all human guardianship had come to an end of their prunes. As their foster-mother's attention was taken up by the officer with whom she was chatting, they seized the opportunity, and banded themselves together in a compact file, so as to make yet another assault upon the latch of the door that stood between them and the tempting heap of dried plums. They advanced to the attack, not like French soldiers,

but as stealthily as Germans, impelled by frank animal greediness.

"Oh! you little rogues! Do you want to finish them up?"

The old woman rose, caught the strongest of the four, administered a gentle slap on the back, and flung him out of the house. Not a tear did he shed, but the others remained breathless with astonishment.

"They give you a lot of trouble——"

"Oh! no, sir, but they can smell the prunes, the little dears. If I were to leave them alone here for a moment, they would stuff themselves with them."

"You are very fond of them?"

The old woman raised her head at this, and looked at him with gentle malice in her eyes.

"Fond of them!" she said. "I have had to part with three of them already. I only have the care of them until they are six years old," she went on with a sigh.

"But where are your own children?"

"I have lost them."

"How old are you!" Genestas asked, to efface the impression made by his last question.

"I am thirty-eight years old, sir. It will be two years come next St. John's Day since my husband died."

She finished dressing the poor sickly mite, who seemed to thank her by a loving look in his faded eyes.

"What a life of toil and self-denial!" thought the cavalry officer.

Beneath a roof worthy of the stable wherein Jesus Christ was born, the hardest duties of motherhood were fulfilled cheerfully and without consciousness of merit. What hearts were these that lay so deeply buried in neglect and obscurity! What wealth and what poverty! Soldiers, better than other men, can appreciate the element of grandeur to be found in heroism in sabots, in the Evangel clad in rags. The Book may be found

elsewhere, adorned, embellished, tricked out in silk and satin and brocade, but here, of a surety, dwelt the spirit of the Book. It was impossible to doubt that heaven had some holy purpose underlying it all, at the sight of the woman who had taken a mother's lot upon herself, as Jesus Christ had taken the form of a man, who gleaned and suffered and ran into debt for her little waifs; a woman who defrauded herself in her reckonings, and would not own that she was ruining herself that she might be a mother. One was constrained to admit, at the sight of her, that the good upon earth have something in common with the angels in heaven; Commandant Genestas shook his head as he looked at her.

"Is M. Benassis a clever doctor?" he asked at last.

"I do not know, sir, but he cures poor people for nothing."

"It seems to me that this is a man and no mistake!" he went on, speaking to himself.

"Oh! yes, sir, and a good man too! There is scarcely any one hereabouts that does not put his name in their prayers, morning and night!"

"That is for you, mother," said the soldier, as he gave her several coins, "and that is for the children," he went on, as he added another crown. "Is M. Benassis' house still a long way off?" he asked, when he had mounted his horse.

"Oh! no, sir, a bare league at most."

The commandant set out, fully persuaded that two leagues remained ahead of him. Yet after all he soon caught a glimpse through the trees of the little town's first cluster of houses, and then of all the roofs that crowded about a conical steeple, whose slates were secured to the angles of the wooden framework by sheets of tin that glittered in the sun. This sort of roof, which has a peculiar appearance, denotes the nearness of the borders of Savoy, where it is very common. The valley is wide at this particular point, and a fair number of houses pleasantly situated, either in the little plain or along the side of the mountain stream, lend human interest to the

well-tilled spot, a stronghold with no apparent outlet among the mountains that surround it.

It was noon when Genestas reined in his horse beneath an avenue of elm trees half-way up the hillside, and only a few paces from the town, to ask the group of children who stood before him for M. Benassis' house. At first the children looked at each other, then they scrutinized the stranger with the expression that they usually wear when they set eyes upon anything for the first time; a different curiosity and a different thought in every little face. Then the boldest and merriest of the band, a little bright-eyed urchin, with bare, muddy feet, repeated his words over again, in child fashion.

"M. Benassis' house, sir?" adding, "I will show you the way there."

He walked along in front of the horse, prompted quite as much by a wish to gain a kind of importance by being in the stranger's company, as by a child's love of being useful, or the imperative craving to be doing something, that possesses mind and body at his age. The officer followed him for the entire length of the principal street of the country town. The way was paved with cobble-stones, and wound in and out among the houses, which their owners had erected along its course in the most arbitrary fashion. In one place a bake-house had been built out into the middle of the roadway; in another a gable protruded, partially obstructing the passage, and yet farther on a mountain stream flowed across it in a runnel. Genestas noticed a fair number of roofs of tarred shingle, but yet more of them were thatched; a few were tiled, and some seven or eight (belonging no doubt to the curé, the justice of the peace, and some of the wealthier townsmen) were covered with slates. There was a total absence of regard for appearances befitting a village at the end of the world, which had nothing beyond it, and no connection with any other place. The people who lived in it seemed to belong to one family that dwelt beyond the limits

of the bustling world, with which the collector of taxes and a few ties of the very slenderest alone served to connect them.

When Genestas had gone a step or two farther, he saw on the mountain side a broad road that rose above the village. Clearly there must be an old town and a new town; and, indeed, when the commandant reached a spot where he could slacken the pace of his horse, he could easily see between the houses some well-built dwellings whose new roofs brightened the old-fashioned village. An avenue of trees rose above these new houses, and from among them came the confused sounds of several industries. He heard the songs peculiar to busy toilers, a murmur of many workshops, the rasping of files, and the sound of falling hammers. He saw the thin lines of smoke from the chimneys of each household, and the more copious outpourings from the forges of the van-builder, the blacksmith, and the farrier. At length, at the very end of the village towards which his guide was taking him, Genestas beheld scattered farms and well-tilled fields and plantations of trees in thorough order. It might have been a little corner of Brie, so hidden away in a great fold of the land, that at first sight its existence would not be suspected between the little town and the mountains that closed the country round.

Presently the child stopped.

"There is the door of *his* house," he remarked.

The officer dismounted and passed his arm through the bridle. Then, thinking that the laborer is worthy of his hire, he drew a few sous from his waistcoat pocket, and held them out to the child, who looked astonished at this, opened his eyes very wide, and stayed on, without thanking him, to watch what the stranger would do next.

"Civilization has not made much headway hereabouts," thought Genestas; "the religion of work is in full force, and begging has not yet come thus far."

His guide, more from curiosity than from any interested

motive, propped himself against the wall that rose to the height of a man's elbow. Upon this wall, which enclosed the yard belonging to the house, there ran a black wooden railing on either side of the square pillars of the gates. The lower part of the gates themselves was of solid wood that had been painted gray at some period in the past; the upper part consisted of a grating of yellowish spear-shaped bars. These decorations, which had lost all their color, gradually rose on either half of the gates till they reached the centre where they met; their spikes forming, when both leaves were shut, an outline similar to that of a pine-cone. The worm-eaten gates themselves, with their patches of velvet lichen, were almost destroyed by the alternate action of sun and rain. A few aloe plants and some chance-sown pellitory grew on the tops of the square pillars of the gates, which all but concealed the stems of a couple of thornless acacias that raised their tufted spikes, like a pair of green powder-puffs, in the yard.

The condition of the gateway revealed a certain carelessness in its owner which did not seem to suit the officer's turn of mind. He knitted his brows like a man who is obliged to relinquish some illusion. We usually judge others by our own standard; and although we indulgently forgive our own shortcomings in them, we condemn them harshly for the lack of our special virtues. If the commandant had expected M. Benassis to be a methodical or practical man, there were unmistakable indications of absolute indifference as to his material concerns in the state of the gates of his house. A soldier possessed of Genestas' passion for domestic economy could not help at once drawing inferences as to the life and character of its owner from the gateway before him; and this, in spite of his habits of circumspection, he in nowise failed to do. The gates were left ajar, moreover—another piece of carelessness!

Encouraged by this countrified trust in all comers, the officer entered the yard without ceremony, and tethered his



horse to the bars of the gate. While he was knotting the bridle, a neighing sound from the stable caused both horse and rider to turn their eyes involuntarily in that direction. The door opened, and an old servant put out his head. He wore a red woollen bonnet, exactly like the Phrygian cap in which Liberty is tricked out, a piece of head-gear in common use in this country.

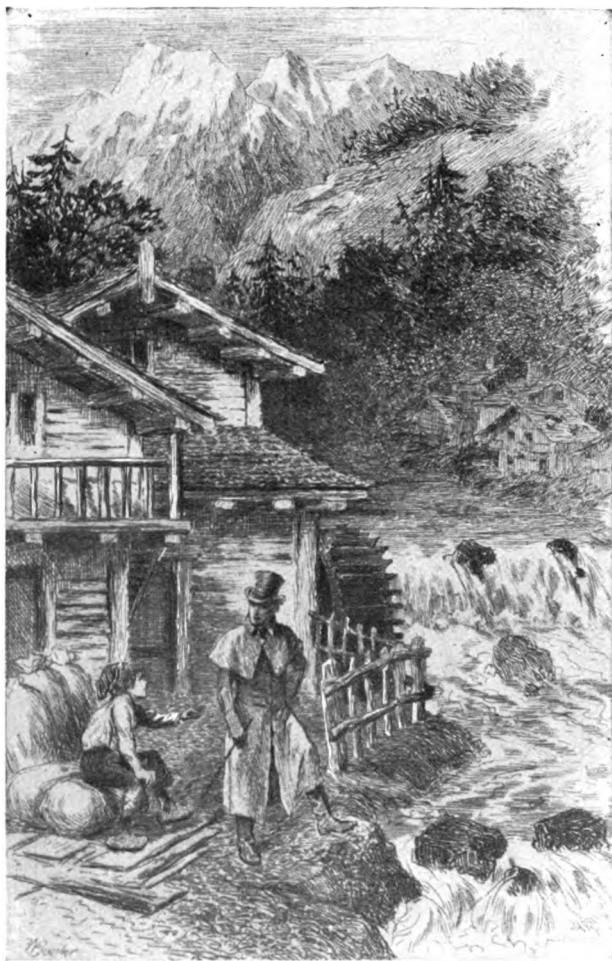
As there was room for several horses, this worthy individual, after inquiring whether Genestas had come to see M. Benassis, offered the hospitality of the stable to the newly-arrived steed, a very fine animal, at which he looked with an expression of admiring affection. The commandant followed his horse to see how things were to go with it. The stable was clean, there was plenty of litter, and there was the same peculiar air of sleek content about M. Benassis' pair of horses that distinguishes the curé's horse from all the rest of his tribe. A maidservant from within the house came out upon the flight of steps and waited. She appeared to be the proper authority to whom the stranger's inquiries were to be addressed, although the stableman had already told him that M. Benassis was not at home.

"The master has gone to the flour-mill," said he. "If you like to overtake him, you have only to go along the path that leads to the meadow ; and the mill is at the end of it."

Genestas preferred seeing the country to waiting about indefinitely for Benassis' return, so he set out along the way that led to the flour-mill. When he had gone beyond the irregular line traced by the town upon the hillside, he came in sight of the mill and the valley, and of one of the loveliest landscapes that he had ever seen.

The mountains bar the course of the river, which forms a little lake at their feet, and raise their crests above it, tier on tier. Their many valleys are revealed by the changing hues of the light, or by the more or less clear outlines of the mountain ridges fledged with their dark forests of pines. The mill





*"M. BENASSIS WENT OVER THERE."*



had not long been built. It stood just where the mountain stream fell into the little lake. There was all the charm about it peculiar to a lonely house surrounded by water and hidden away behind the heads of a few trees that love to grow by the water-side. On the farther bank of the river, at the foot of a mountain with a faint red glow of sunset upon its highest crest, Genestas caught a glimpse of a dozen deserted cottages. All the windows and doors had been taken away, and sufficiently large holes were conspicuous in the dilapidated roofs, but the surrounding land was laid out in fields that were highly cultivated, and the old garden spaces had been turned into meadows, watered by a system of irrigation as artfully contrived as that in use in Limousin. Unconsciously the commandant paused to look at the ruins of the village before him.

How is it that men can never behold any ruins, even of the humblest kind, without feeling deeply stirred? Doubtless it is because they seem to be a typical representation of evil fortune whose weight is felt so differently by different natures. The thought of death is called up by a churchyard, but a deserted village puts us in mind of the sorrows of life; death is but one misfortune always foreseen, but the sorrows of life are infinite. Does not the thought of the infinite underlie all great melancholy?

The officer reached the stony path by the mill-pond before he could hit upon an explanation of this deserted village. The miller's lad was sitting on some sacks of corn near the door of the house. Genestas asked for M. Benassis.

"M. Benassis went over there," said the miller, pointing out one of the ruined cottages.

"Has the village been burned down?" asked the commandant.

"No, sir."

"Then how did it come to be in this state?" inquired Genestas.

"Ah! how," the miller answered, as he shrugged his shoulders and went indoors; "M. Benassis will tell you that."

The officer went over a rough sort of bridge built up of boulders taken from the torrent bed, and soon reached the house that had been pointed out to him. The thatched roof of the dwelling was still entire; it was covered with moss indeed, but there were no holes in it, and the door and its fastenings seemed to be in good repair. Genestas saw a fire on the hearth as he entered, an old woman kneeling in the chimney-corner before a sick man seated in a chair, and another man, who was standing with his face turned toward the fireplace. The house consisted of a single room, which was lighted by a wretched window covered with linen cloth. The floor was of beaten earth; the chair, a table, and a truckle bed comprised the whole of the furniture. The commandant had never seen anything so poor and bare, not even in Russia, where the moujik's huts are like the dens of wild beasts. Nothing within it spoke of ordinary life; there were not even the simplest appliances for cooking food of the commonest description. It might have been a dog kennel without a drinking-pan. But for the truckle bed, a smock-frock hanging from a nail, and some sabots filled with straw, which composed the invalid's entire wardrobe, this cottage would have looked as empty as the other. The aged peasant woman upon her knees was devoting all her attention to keeping the sufferer's feet in a tub filled with a brown liquid. Hearing a footstep and the clank of spurs, which sounded strangely in ears accustomed to the plodding pace of country folk, the man turned towards Genestas. A sort of surprise, in which the old woman shared, was visible in his face.

"There is no need to ask if you are M. Benassis," said the soldier. "You will pardon me, sir, if, as a stranger impatient to see you, I have come to seek you on your field of battle, instead of awaiting you at your house. Pray

do not disturb yourself; go on with what you are doing. When it is over, I will tell you the purpose of my visit."

Genestas half-seated himself upon the edge of the table, and remained silent. The firelight shone more brightly in the room than the faint rays of the sun, for the mountain crests intercepted them, so that they seldom reached this corner of the valley. A few branches of resinous pinewood made a bright blaze, and it was by the light of this fire that the soldier saw the face of the man towards whom he was drawn by a secret motive, by a wish to seek him out, to study and to know him thoroughly well. M. Benassis, the local doctor, heard Genestas with indifference, and with folded arms he returned his bow, and went back to his patient, quite unaware that he was being subjected to a scrutiny as earnest as that which the soldier turned upon him.

Benassis was a man of ordinary height, broad-shouldered and deep-chested. A capacious green overcoat, buttoned up to the chin, prevented the officer from observing any characteristic details of his personal appearance; but his dark and motionless figure served as a strong relief to his face, which caught the bright light of the blazing fire. The face was not unlike that of a satyr; there was the same slightly protruding forehead, full, in this case, of prominences, all more or less denoting character; the same turned-up nose, with a sprightly cleavage at the tip; the same high cheek-bones. The lines of the mouth were crooked; the lips, thick and red. The chin turned sharply upwards. There was an alert, animated look in the brown eyes, to which their pearly whites gave great brightness, and which expressed passions now subdued. His iron-gray hair, the deep wrinkles in his face, the bushy eyebrows that had grown white already, the veins on his protuberant nose, the tanned face covered with red blotches, everything about him, in short, indicated a man of fifty and the hard work of his profession. The officer



could come to no conclusion as to the capacity of the head, which was covered by a close cap ; but hidden though it was, it seemed to him to be one of the square-shaped kind that gave rise to the expression "square-headed." Genestas was accustomed to read the indications that mark the features of men destined to do great things, since he had been brought into close relations with the energetic natures sought out by Napoleon ; so he suspected that there must be some mystery in this life of obscurity, and said to himself as he looked at the remarkable face before him—

"How comes it that he is still a country doctor?"

When he had made a careful study of this countenance, that, in spite of its resemblance to other human faces, revealed an inner life nowise in harmony with a common-place exterior, he could not help sharing the doctor's interest in his patient ; and the sight of that patient completely changed the current of his thoughts.

Much as the old cavalry officer had seen in the course of his soldier's career, he felt a thrill of surprise and horror at the sight of a human face which could never have been lighted up with thought—a livid face in which a look of dumb suffering showed so plainly—the same look that is sometimes worn by a child too young to speak and too weak to cry any longer ; in short, it was the wholly animal face of an old dying crétin. The crétin was the one variety of the human species with which the commandant had not yet come in contact. At the sight of the deep, circular folds of skin on the forehead, the sodden, fish-like eyes, and the head, with its short, coarse, scantily-growing hair—a head utterly divested of all the faculties of the senses—who would not have experienced, as Genestas did, an instinctive feeling of repulsion for a being that had neither the physical beauty of an animal nor the mental endowments of man, who was possessed of neither instinct nor reason, and who had never heard nor spoken any kind of articulate speech ? It seemed difficult to expend any regrets

over the poor wretch now visibly drawing towards the very end of an existence which had not been life in any sense of the word ; yet the old woman watched him with touching anxiety, and was rubbing his legs where the hot water did not reach them with as much tenderness as if he had been her husband. Benassis himself, after a close scrutiny of the dull eyes and corpse-like face, gently took the crétin's hand and felt his pulse.

"The bath is doing no good," he said, shaking his head ; "let us put him to bed again."

He lifted the inert mass himself, and carried him across to the truckle bed, from whence, no doubt, he had just taken him. Carefully he laid him at full length, and straightened the limbs that were growing cold already, putting the head and hand in position, with all the heed that a mother could bestow upon her child.

"It is all over, death is very near," added Benassis, who remained standing by the bedside.

The old woman gazed at the dying form, with her hands on her hips. A few tears stole down her cheeks. Genestas remained silent. He was unable to explain to himself how it was that the death of a being that concerned him so little should affect him so much. Unconsciously he shared the feeling of boundless pity that these hapless creatures excite among the dwellers in the sunless valleys wherein nature has placed them. This sentiment has degenerated into a kind of religious superstition in families to which crétins belong ; but does it not spring from the most beautiful of Christian virtues—from charity, and from a belief in a reward hereafter, that most effectual support of our social system, and the one thought that enables us to endure our miseries ? The hope of inheriting eternal bliss helps the relations of these unhappy creatures and all others round about them to exert on a large scale, and with sublime devotion, a mother's ceaseless protecting care over an apathetic creature who does not under-

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stand it in the first instance, and who in a little while forgets it all. Wonderful power of religion ! that has brought a blind beneficence to the aid of an equally blind misery. Wherever crétins exist, there is a popular belief that the presence of one of these creatures brings luck to a family—a superstition that serves to sweeten lives which, in the midst of a town population, would be condemned by a mistaken philanthropy to submit to the harsh discipline of an asylum. In the higher end of the valley of the Isère, where crétins are very numerous, they lead an out-of-door life with the cattle, which they are taught to herd. There, at any rate, they are at large, and receive the reverence due to misfortune.

A moment later the village bell clinked at slow regular intervals, to acquaint the flock with the death of one of their number. In the sound that reached the cottage but faintly across the intervening space there was a thought of religion which seemed to fill it with a melancholy peace. The tread of many feet echoed up the road, giving notice of an approaching crowd of people—a crowd that uttered not a word. Then suddenly the chanting of the Church broke the stillness, calling up the confused thoughts that take possession of the most sceptical minds, and compel them to yield to the influence of the touching harmonies of the human voice. The Church was coming to the aid of a creature that knew her not. The curé appeared, preceded by a choir-boy, who bore the crucifix, and followed by the sacristan carrying the vase of holy water, and by some fifty women, old men, and children, who had all come to add their prayers to those of the Church. The doctor and the soldier looked at each other, and silently withdrew to a corner to make room for the kneeling crowd within and without the cottage. During the consoling ceremony of the Viaticum, celebrated for one who had never sinned, but to whom the Church on earth was bidding a last farewell, there were signs of real sorrow on most of the rough faces of the gathering, and tears flowed over rugged

cheeks that sun and wind and labor in the fields had tanned and wrinkled. The sentiment of voluntary kinship was easy to explain. There was not one in the place who had not pitied the unhappy creature, not one who would not have given him his daily bread. Had he not met with a father's care from every child, and found a mother in the merriest little girl?

"He is dead," said the curé.

The words struck his hearers with the most unfeigned dismay. The tall candles were lighted, and several people undertook to watch with the dead that night. Benassis and the soldier went out. A group of peasants in the doorway stopped the doctor to say—

"Ah! if you have not saved his life, sir, it was doubtless because God wished to take him to Himself."

"I did my best, children," the doctor answered.

When they had come a few paces from the deserted village, whose last inhabitant had just died, the doctor spoke to Genestas.

"You would not believe, sir, what real solace is contained for me in what those peasants have just said. Ten years ago I was very nearly stoned to death in this village. It is empty to-day, but thirty families lived in it then."

Genestas' face and gesture so plainly expressed an inquiry, that, as they went along, the doctor told him the story promised by this beginning.

"When I first settled here, sir, I found a dozen crétins in this part of the canton," and the doctor turned round to point out the ruined cottages for the officer's benefit. "All the favorable conditions for spreading the hideous disease are there: the air is stagnant, the hamlet lies in the valley bottom, close beside a torrent supplied with water by the melted snows, and the sunlight only falls on the mountain-top, so that the valley itself gets no good of the sun. Marriages among these unfortunate creatures are not forbidden by law,

and in this district they are protected by superstitious notions, of whose power I had no conception—superstitions which I blamed at first, and afterwards came to admire. So crétinism was in a fair way to spread all over the valley from this spot. Was it not doing the country a great service to put a stop to this mental and physical contagion? But imperatively as the salutary changes were required, they might cost the life of any man who endeavored to bring them about. Here, as in other social spheres, if any good is to be done, we come into collision not merely with vested interests, but with something far more dangerous to meddle with—religious ideas crystallized into superstitions, the most permanent form taken by human thought. I feared nothing.

“In the first place, I sought for the position of mayor in the canton, and in this I succeeded. Then, after obtaining a verbal sanction from the prefect, and by paying down the money, I had several of these unfortunate creatures transported over the Aiguebelle, in Savoy, by night. There are a great many of them there, and they were certain to be very kindly treated. When this act of humanity came to be known, the whole countryside looked upon me as a monster. The curé preached against me. In spite of all the pains I took to explain to all the shrewder heads of the little place the immense importance of being rid of the idiots, and in spite of the fact that I gave my services gratuitously to the sick people of the district, a shot was fired at me from the corner of a wood.

“I went to the Bishop of Grenoble and asked him to change the curé. Monseigneur was good enough to allow me to choose a priest who would share in my labors, and it was my happy fortune to meet with one of those rare natures that seemed to have dropped down from heaven. Then I went on with my enterprise. After preparing people’s minds, I made another transportation by night, and six more crétins were taken away. In this second attempt I had the support

of several people to whom I had rendered some service, and I was backed by the members of the Communal Council, for I had appealed to their parsimonious instincts, showing them how much it cost to support the poor wretches, and pointing out how largely they might gain by converting their plots of ground (to which the idiots had no proper title) into allotments which were needed in the township.

"All the rich were on my side; but the poor, the old women, the children, and a few pig-headed people were violently opposed to me. Unluckily it so fell out that my last removal had not been completely carried out. The crétin whom you had just seen, not having returned to his house, had not been taken away, so that the next morning he was the sole remaining example of his species in the village. There were several families still living there; but though they were little better than idiots, they were, at any rate, free from the taint of crétinism. I determined to go through with my work, and came officially in open day to take the luckless creature from his dwelling. I had no sooner left my house than my intention got abroad. The crétin's friends were there before me, and in front of his hovel I found a crowd of women and children and old people, who hailed my arrival with insults accompanied by a shower of stones.

"In the midst of the uproar I should perhaps have fallen a victim to the frenzy that possesses a crowd excited by its own outcries and stirred up by one common feeling, but the crétin saved my life! The poor creature came out of his hut, and raised the clucking sound of his voice. He seemed to be an absolute ruler over the fanatical mob, for the sight of him put a sudden stop to the clamor. It occurred to me that I might arrange a compromise, and thanks to the quiet so opportunely restored, I was able to propose and explain it. Of course, those who approved of my schemes would not dare to second me in this emergency, their support was sure to be of a purely passive kind, while these superstitious folk would exert the

most active vigilance to keep their last idol among them ; it was impossible, it seemed to me, to take him away from them. So I promised to leave the cr  tin in peace in his dwelling, with the understanding that he should live quite by himself, and that the remaining families in the village should cross the stream and come to live in the town, in some new houses which I myself undertook to build, adding to each house a piece of ground for which the commune was to repay me later on.

“Well, my dear sir, it took me fully six months to overcome their objection to this bargain, however much it may have been to the advantage of the village families. The affection which they have for their wretched hovels in country districts is something quite unexplainable. No matter how unwholesome his hovel may be, a peasant clings far more to it than a banker does to his mansion. The reason of it ? That I do not know. Perhaps thoughts and feelings are strongest in those who have but few of them, simply because they have but few. Perhaps material things count for much in the lives of those who live so little in thought ; certain it is that the less they have, the dearer their possessions are to them. Perhaps, too, it is with the peasant as with the prisoner—he does not squander the powers of his soul, he centres them all upon a single idea, and this is how his feelings come to be so exceedingly strong. Pardon these reflections on the part of a man who seldom exchanges ideas with any one. But, indeed, you must not suppose, sir, that I am much taken up with these far-fetched considerations. We all have to be active and practical here.

“Alas ! the fewer ideas these poor folk have in their heads, the harder it is to make them see where their real interests lie. There was nothing for it but to give my whole attention to every trifling detail of my enterprise. One and all made me the same answer, one of those sayings, filled with homely sense, to which there is no possible reply, ‘But your houses

are not yet built, sir ! ' they used to say. ' Very good,' said I, ' promise me that as soon as they are finished you will come and live in them.'

" Luckily, sir, I obtained a decision to the effect that the whole of the mountain side above the now deserted village was the property of the township. The sum of money brought in by the woods on the higher slopes paid for the building of the new houses and for the land on which they stood. They were built forthwith; and when once one of my refractory families was fairly settled in, the rest of them were not slow to follow. The benefits of the change were so evident that even the most bigoted believer in the village, which you might call soulless as well as sunless, could not but appreciate them. The final decision in this matter, which gave some property to the commune, in the possession of which we were confirmed by the Council of State, made me a person of great importance in the canton. But what a lot of worry there was over it ! " the doctor remarked, stopping short, and raising a hand, which he let fall again—a gesture that spoke volumes. " No one knows, as I do, the distance between the town and the Prefecture—whence nothing comes out—and from the Prefecture to the Council of State—where nothing can be got in.

" Well, after all," he resumed, " peace be to the powers of this world ! They yielded to my importunities, and that is saying a great deal. If you only knew the good that came of a carelessly scrawled signature ! Why, sir, two years after I had taken those momentous trifles in hand, and had carried the matter through to the end, every poor family in the commune had two cows at least, which they pastured on the mountain side, where (without waiting this time for an authorization from the Council of State) I had established a system of irrigation by means of cross trenches, like those in Switzerland, Auvergne, and Limousin. Much to their astonishment, the townspeople saw some capital meadows springing



up under their eyes, and thanks to the improvement in the pasturage, the yield of milk was very much larger. The results of this triumph were great indeed. Every one followed the example set by my system of irrigation; cattle were multiplied; the area of meadow land and every kind of out-turn increased. I had nothing to fear after that. I could continue my efforts to improve this, as yet, untilled corner of the earth; and to civilize those who dwelt in it, whose minds had hitherto lain dormant.

"Well, sir, folk like us, who live out of the world, are very talkative. If you ask us a question, there is no knowing where the answer will come to an end; but to cut it short—there were about seven hundred souls in the valley when I came to it, and now the population numbers some two thousand. I had gained the good opinion of every one in that matter of the last crétin; and when I had constantly shown that I could rule both mildly and firmly, I became a local oracle. I did everything that I could to win their confidence; I did not ask for it, nor did I appear to seek it; but I tried to inspire every one with the deepest respect for my character, by the scrupulous way in which I always fulfilled my engagements, even when they were of the most trifling kind. When I had pledged myself to the care of the poor creature whose death you have just witnessed, I looked after him much more effectually than any of his previous guardians had done. He has been fed and cared for as the adopted child of the commune. After a time the dwellers in the valley ended by understanding the service which I had done them in spite of themselves, but, for all that, they still cherish some traces of that old superstition of theirs. Far be it from me to blame them for it; has not their cult of the crétin often furnished me with an argument when I have tried to induce those who had possession of their faculties to help the unfortunate? But here we are," said Benassis, when after a moment's pause he saw the roof of his own house.

Far from expecting the slightest expression of praise or of thanks from his listener, it appeared from his way of telling the story of this episode in his administrative career that he had been moved by an unconscious desire to pour out the thoughts that filled his mind, after the manner of folk that live very retired lives.

"I have taken the liberty of putting my horse in your stable, sir," said the commandant, "for which in your goodness you will perhaps pardon me when you learn the object of my journey hither."

"Ah! yes, what is it?" asked Benassis, appearing to shake off his preoccupied mood, and to recollect that his companion was a stranger to him. The frankness and unreserve of his nature had led him to accept Genestas as an acquaintance.

"I have heard of the almost miraculous recovery of M. Gravier of Grenoble, whom you received into your house," was the soldier's answer. "I have come to you, hoping that you will give a like attention to my case, although I have not a similar claim to your benevolence; and yet I am possibly not undeserving of it. I am an old soldier, and wounds of long standing give me no peace. It will take you at least a week to study my conditions, for the pain only comes back at intervals, and——"

"Very good, sir," Benassis broke in; "M. Gravier's room is in readiness. Come in."

They went into the house, the doctor flinging open the door with an eagerness that Genestas attributed to his pleasure at receiving a boarder.

"Jacquotte!" Benassis called out. "This gentleman will dine with us."

"But would it not be as well for us to settle about the payment?"

"Payment for what?" inquired the doctor, looking at Genestas with some surprise.

"For my board. You cannot keep me, and my horse as well, without——"

"If you are wealthy, you will repay me amply," Benassis replied; "and if you are not, I will take nothing whatever."

"Nothing whatever seems to me to be too dear," said Genestas. "But, rich or poor, will ten francs a day (not including your professional services) be acceptable to you?"

"Nothing could be less acceptable to me than payment for the pleasure of entertaining a visitor," the doctor answered, knitting his brows; "and as to my advice, you shall have it if I like you, and not unless. Rich people shall not have my time by paying for it; it belongs exclusively to the folk here in the valley. I do not care about fame or fortune, and I look for neither praise nor gratitude from my patients. Any money which you may pay me will go to the druggists in Grenoble, to pay for the medicine required by the poor of the neighborhood."

Any one who had heard the words flung out, abruptly, it is true, but without a trace of bitterness in them, would have said to himself with Genestas, "Here is a man made of good human clay."

"Well, then, I will pay you ten francs a day, sir," the soldier answered, returning to the charge with wonted pertinacity, "and you will do as you choose after that. We shall understand each other better now that the question is settled," he added, grasping the doctor's hand with eager cordiality. "In spite of my ten francs, you shall see that I am by no means a Tartar."

After this passage of arms, in which Benassis showed not the slightest sign of a wish to appear generous or to pose as a philanthropist, the supposed invalid entered his doctor's house. Everything within it was in keeping with the ruinous state of the gateway, and with the clothing worn by its owner. There was an utter disregard for everything not essentially useful, which was visible even in the smallest

trifles. Benassis took Genestas through the kitchen, that being the shortest way to the dining-room.

Had the said kitchen belonged to an inn, it could not have been more smoke-begrimed ; and if there was a sufficiency of cooking pots within its precincts, this lavish supply was Jacquotte's doing—Jacquotte, who had formerly been the curé's housekeeper—Jacquotte, who always said "we" and who ruled supreme over the doctor's household. If, for instance, there was a brightly polished warming-pan above the mantle-shelf, it probably hung there because Jacquotte liked to sleep warm of a winter night, which led her incidentally to warm her master's sheets. He never took a thought about anything, so she was wont to say.

It was on account of a defect, which any one else would have found intolerable, that Benassis had taken her into his service. Jacquotte had a mind to rule the house, and a woman who would rule his house was the very person that the doctor wanted. So Jacquotte bought and sold, made alterations about the place, set up and took down, arranged and disarranged everything at her own sweet will ; her master had never raised a murmur. Over the yard, the stable, the manservant and the kitchen, in fact, over the whole house and garden and its master, Jacquotte's sway was absolute. She looked out fresh linen, saw to the washing, and laid in provisions without consulting anybody. She decided everything that went on in the house, and the date when the pigs were to be killed. She scolded the gardener, decreed the menu at breakfast and dinner, and went from cellar to garret, and from garret to cellar, setting everything to rights according to her notions, without a word of opposition of any sort or description. Benassis had made but two stipulations—he wished to dine at six o'clock, and that the household expenses should not exceed a certain fixed sum every month.

A woman whom every one obeys in this way is always singing, so Jacquotte laughed and warbled on the staircase ; she

was always humming something when she was not singing, and singing when she was not humming. Jacquotte had a natural liking for cleanliness, so she kept the house neat and clean. If her tastes had been different, it would have been a sad thing for M. Benassis (so she was wont to say), for the poor man was so little particular that you might feed him on cabbage for partridges, and he would not find it out; and if it were not for her, he would very often wear the same shirt for a week on end. Jacquotte, however, was an indefatigable folder of linen, a born rubber and polisher of furniture, and a passionate lover of a perfectly religious and ceremonial cleanliness of the most scrupulous, the most radiant, and most fragrant kind. A sworn foe to dust, she swept and scoured and washed without ceasing.

The condition of the gateway caused her acute distress. On the first day of every month for the past ten years she had extorted from her master a promise that he would replace the gate with a new one, that the walls of the house should be lime-washed, and that everything should be made quite straight and proper about the place; but so far, the master had not kept his word. So it happened that whenever she fell to lamenting over Benassis' deeply-rooted carelessness about things, she nearly always ended solemnly in these words, with which all her praises of her master usually terminated—

“You cannot say that he is a fool, because he works such miracles, as you may say, in the place; but, all the same, he is a fool at times, such a fool that you have to do everything for him as if he were a child.”

Jacquotte loved the house as if it had belonged to her; and when she had lived in it for twenty-two years, had she not some grounds for deluding herself on that head? After the curé's death the house had been for sale; and Benassis, who had only just come into the country, had bought it as it stood, with the walls about it and the ground belonging to it, together with the plate, wine, and furniture, the old sun-dial, the poultry

the horse, and the womanservant. Jacquotte was the very pattern of a working housekeeper, with her clumsy figure, and her bodice, always of the same dark brown print with large red spots on it, which fitted her so tightly that it looked as if the material must give way if she moved at all. Her colorless face, with its double chin, looked out from under a round plaited cap, which made her look paler than she really was. She talked incessantly, and always in a loud voice—this short, active woman, with the plump, busy hands. Indeed, if Jacquotte was silent for a moment, and took a corner of her apron so as to turn it up in a triangle, it meant that a lengthy expostulation was about to be delivered for the benefit of master or man. Jacquotte was beyond all doubt the happiest cook in the kingdom; for, that nothing might be lacking in a measure of felicity as great as may be known in this world below, her vanity was continually gratified—the townspeople regarded her as an authority of an indefinite kind, and ranked her somewhere between the mayor and the park-keeper.

The master of the house found nobody in the kitchen when he entered it.

“Where the devil are they all gone?” he asked. “Pardon me for bringing you in this way,” he went on, turning to Genestas. “The front entrance opens into the garden, but I am so little accustomed to receive visitors that—Jacquotte!” he called in rather peremptory tones.

A woman’s voice answered to the name from the interior of the house. A moment later Jacquotte, assuming the offensive, called in her turn to Benassis, who forthwith went into the dining-room.

“Just like you, sir!” she exclaimed; “you never do like anybody else. You always ask people to dinner without telling me beforehand, and you think that everything is settled as soon as you have called for Jacquotte! You are not going to have the gentleman sit in the kitchen, are you?”

Is not the salon to be unlocked and a fire to be lighted? Nicole is there, and will see after everything. Now take the gentleman into the garden for a minute; that will amuse him; if he likes to look at pretty things, show him the arbor of hornbeam trees that the poor dear old gentleman made. I shall have time then to lay the cloth and to get everything ready, the dinner and the salon too."

"Yes. But, Jacquotte," Benassis went on, "the gentleman is going to stay with us. Do not forget to give a look round M. Gravier's room, and see about the sheets and things, and——"

"Now you are not going to interfere about the sheets, are you?" asked Jacquotte. "If he is to sleep here, I know what must be done for him perfectly well. You have not so much as set foot in M. Gravier's room these ten months past. There is nothing to see there, the place is as clean as a new pin. Then will the gentleman make some stay here?" she continued in a milder tone.

"Yes."

"How long will he stay?"

"Faith, I do not know. What does it matter to you?"

"What does it matter to me, sir? Oh! very well, what does it matter to me? Did anyone ever hear the like! And the provisions and all that, and——"

At any other time she would have overwhelmed her master with reproaches for his breach of trust, but now she followed him into the kitchen before the torrent of words had come to an end. She had guessed that there was a prospect of a boarder, and was eager to see Genestas, to whom she made a very deferential curtsy, while she scanned him from head to foot. A thoughtful and dejected expression gave a harsh look to the soldier's face. In the dialogue between master and servant the latter had appeared to him in the light of a non-entity; and although he regretted the fact, this revelation had lessened the high opinion that he had formed of the man

whose persistent efforts to save the district from the horrors of crétinism had won his admiration.

"I do not like the looks of that fellow at all!" said Jacquotte to herself.

"If you are not tired, sir," said the doctor to his supposed patient, "we will take a turn round the garden before dinner."

"Willingly," answered the commandant.

They went through the dining-room, and reached the garden by way of a sort of vestibule at the foot of the staircase between the salon and the dining-room. Beyond a great glass door at the farther end of the vestibule lay a flight of stone steps which adorned the garden side of the house. The garden itself was divided into four large squares of equal size by two paths that intersected each other in the form of a cross, a box edging along their sides. At the farther end there was a thick, green alley of hornbeam trees, which had been the joy and pride of the late owner. The soldier seated himself on a worm-eaten bench, and saw neither the trellis-work nor the espaliers, nor the vegetables of which Jacquotte took such great care. She followed the traditions of the epicurean churchman to whom this valuable garden owed its origin; but Benassis himself regarded it with sufficient indifference.

The commandant turned their talk from the trivial matters which had occupied them by saying to the doctor—

"How comes it, sir, that the population of the valley has been trebled in ten years? There were seven hundred souls in it when you came, and to-day you say that they number more than two thousand."

"You are the first person who has put that question to me," the doctor answered. "Though it has been my aim to develop the capabilities of this little corner of the earth to the utmost, the constant pressure of a busy life has not left me time to think over the way in which (like the mendicant brother) I have made 'broth from a flint' on a large scale.



M. Gravier himself, who is one of several who have done a great deal for us, and to whom I was able to render a service by re-establishing his health, has never given a thought to the theory, though he has been everywhere over our mountain sides with me, to see its practical results."

There was a moment's silence, during which Benassis followed his own thoughts, careless of the keen glance by which his guest tried to fathom him.

"You ask how it came about, my dear sir?" the doctor resumed. "It came about quite naturally through the working of the social law by which the need and means of supplying it are correlated. Herein lies the whole story. Races who have no wants are always poor. When I first came to live here in this township there were about a hundred and thirty peasant families in it, and some two hundred hearths in the valley. The local authorities were such as might be expected in the prevailing wretchedness of the population. The mayor himself could not write, and the deputy-mayor was a small farmer, who lived beyond the limits of the commune. The justice of the peace was a poor devil who had nothing but his salary, and who was forced to relinquish the registration of births, marriages, and deaths to his clerk, another hapless wretch who was scarcely able to understand his duties. The old curé had died at the age of seventy, and his curate, a quite uneducated man, had just succeeded to his position. These people comprised all the intelligence of the district over which they ruled.

"Those who dwelt amidst these lovely natural surroundings groveled in squalor and lived upon potatoes, milk, butter, and cheese. The only produce that brought in any money was the cheese, which most of them carried in small baskets to Grenoble or its outskirts. The richer or the more energetic among them sowed buckwheat for home consumption; sometimes they raised a crop of barley or oats, but wheat was unknown. The only trader in the place was the mayor, who

owned a sawmill and bought up timber at a low price to sell again. In the absence of roads, his tree trunks had to be transported during the summer season ; each log was dragged along one at a time, and with no small difficulty, by means of a chain attached to a halter about his horse's neck, and an iron hook at the farther end of the chain, which was driven into the wood. Any one who went to Grenoble, whether on horseback or afoot, was obliged to follow a track high up on the mountain side, for the valley was quite impassable. The pretty road between this place and the first village that you reach as you come into the canton (the way along which you must have come) was nothing but a slough at all seasons of the year.

"Political events and revolutions had never reached this inaccessible country—it lay completely beyond the limits of social stir and change. Napoleon's name, and his alone, had penetrated hither ; he is held in great veneration, thanks to one or two old soldiers who have returned to their native homes, and who of evenings tell marvelous tales about his adventures and his armies for the benefit of these simple folk. Their coming back is, moreover, a puzzle that no one can explain. Before I came here, the young men who went into the army all stayed in it for good. This fact in itself is a sufficient revelation of the wretched condition of the country. I need not give you a detailed description of it.

"This, then, was the state of things when I first came to the canton, which has several contented, well-tilled, and fairly prosperous communes belonging to it upon the other side of the mountains. I will say nothing about the hovels in the town ; they were neither more nor less than stables, in which men and animals were indiscriminately huddled together. As there was no inn in the place, I was obliged to ask the curate for a bed, he being in possession, for the time being, of this house, then offered for sale. Putting to him question after question, I came to have some slight knowledge of the lament-

able condition of the country with the pleasant climate, the fertile soil, and the natural productiveness that had impressed me so much.

“At that time, sir, I was seeking to shape a future for myself that should be as little as possible like the troubled life that had left me weary; and one of those thoughts came into my mind that God gives to us at times, to enable us to take up our burdens and bear them. I resolved to develop all the resources of this country, just as a tutor develops the capacities of a child. Do not think too much of my benevolence; the pressing need that I felt for turning my thoughts into fresh channels entered too much into my motives. I had determined to give up the remainder of my life to some difficult task. A lifetime would be required to bring about the needful changes in a canton that nature had made so wealthy, and man so poor; and I was tempted by the practical difficulties that stood in the way. As soon as I found that I could secure the curé's house and plenty of waste land at a small cost, I solemnly devoted myself to the calling of a country surgeon—the very last position that a man aspires to take. I determined to become the friend of the poor, and to expect no reward of any kind from them. Oh! I did not indulge in any illusions as to the nature of the country people, nor as to the hindrances that lie in the way of every attempt to bring about a better state of things among men or their surroundings. I have never made idyllic pictures of my people; I have taken them at their just worth—as poor peasants, neither wholly good nor wholly bad, whose constant toil never allows them to indulge in emotion, though they can feel acutely at times. Above all things, in fact, I clearly understood that I should do nothing with them except through an appeal to their selfish interests, and by schemes for their immediate well-being. The peasants are one and all the sons of St. Thomas, the doubting apostle—they always like words to be supported by visible facts.

"Perhaps you will laugh at my first start, sir," the doctor went on after a pause. "I began my difficult enterprise by introducing the manufacture of baskets. The poor folk used to buy the wicker mats on which they drain their cheeses, and all the baskets needed for the insignificant trade of the district. I suggested to an intelligent young fellow that he might take on lease a good-sized piece of land by the side of the torrent. Every year the floods deposited a rich alluvial soil on this spot, where there should be no difficulty in growing osiers. I reckoned out the quantity of wicker-work of various kinds required from time to time by the canton, and went over to Grenoble, where I found out a young craftsman, a clever worker, but without any capital. When I had discovered him, I soon made up my mind to set him up in business here. I undertook to advance the money for the osiers required for his work until my osier-farmer should be in a position to supply him. I induced him to sell his baskets at rather lower prices than they asked for them in Grenoble, while, at the same time, they were better made. He entered into my views completely. The osier-beds and the basket-making were two business speculations whose results were only appreciated after the lapse of four years. Of course, you know that osiers must be three years old before they are fit to cut.

"At the commencement of operations, the basket-maker was boarded and lodged gratuitously. Before very long he married a woman from Saint Laurent du Pont, who had a little money. Then he had a house built in a healthy and very airy situation, which I chose, and my advice was followed as to the internal arrangements. Here was a triumph! I had created a new industry, and had brought a producer and several workers into the town. I wonder if you will regard my elation as childish?

"For the first few days after my basket-maker had set up his business, I never went past his shop but my heart beat

somewhat faster. And when I saw the newly-built house, with the green-painted shutters, the vine beside the doorway, and the bench and bundles of osiers before it ; when I saw a tidy, neatly-dressed woman within it, nursing a plump, pink and white baby, among the workmen, who were singing merrily and busily plaiting their wicker-work under the superintendence of a man who but lately had looked so pinched and pale, but now had an atmosphere of prosperity about him ; when I saw all this, I confess that I could not forego the pleasure of turning basket-maker for a moment, of going into the shop to hear how things went with them, and of giving myself up to a feeling of content that I cannot express in words, for I had all their happiness as well as my own to make me glad. All my hopes became centred on this house, where the man dwelt who had been the first to put a steady faith in me. Like the basket-maker's wife, clasping her first nursling to her breast, did not I already fondly cherish the hopes of the future of this poor district ?

"I had to do so many things at once," he went on, "I came into collision with other people's notions, and met with violent opposition, fomented by the ignorant mayor to whose office I had succeeded, and whose influence had dwindled away as mine increased. I determined to make him my deputy, and a confederate in my schemes of benevolence. Yes, in the first place, I endeavored to instil enlightened ideas into the densest of all heads. Through his self-love and cupidity I gained a hold upon my man. During six months, as we dined together, I took him deeply into my confidence about my projected improvements. Many people would think this intimacy one of the most painful inflictions in the course of my task ; but was he not a tool of the most valuable kind ? Woe to him who despises his axe, or flings it carelessly aside ! Would it not have been very inconsistent, moreover, if I, who wished to improve a district, had shrank back at the thought of improving one man in it ?

"A road was our first and most pressing need in bringing about a better state of things. If we could obtain permission from the Municipal Council to make a hard road, so as to put us in communication with the highway to Grenoble, the deputy-mayor would be the first gainer by it, for instead of dragging his timber over rough tracks at a great expense, a good road through the canton would enable him to transport it more easily, and to engage in a traffic on a large scale, in all kinds of wood, that would bring in money—not a miserable six hundred francs a year, but handsome sums which would mean a certain fortune for him some day. Convinced at last, he became my proselytizer.

"Through the whole of one winter the ex-mayor got into the way of explaining to our citizens that a good road for wheeled traffic would be a source of wealth to the whole country round, for it would enable every one to do a trade with Grenoble; he held forth on this head at the tavern while drinking with his intimates. When the Municipal Council had authorized the making of the road, I went to the prefect and obtained some money from the charitable funds at the disposal of the department, in order to pay for the hire of carts, for the commune was unable to undertake the transport of road material for lack of wheeled conveyances. The ignorant began to murmur against me, and to say that I wanted to bring back the days of compulsory labor again; this made me anxious to finish this important work, that they might speedily appreciate its benefits. With this end in view, every Sunday during my first year of office I drew the whole population of the township, willing or unwilling, up on to the mountain, where I myself had traced out on a hard bottom the road between our village and the highway to Grenoble. Materials for making it were fortunately to be had in plenty all along the site.

"The tedious enterprise called for a great deal of patience on my part. Some who were ignorant of the law would refuse at times to give their contribution of labor; others,

again, who had not bread to eat, really could not afford to lose a day. Corn had to be distributed among these last, and the others must be soothed with friendly words. Yet by the time we had finished two-thirds of the road, which in all is about two leagues in length, the people had so thoroughly recognized its advantages, that the remaining third was accomplished with a spirit that surprised me. I added to the future wealth of the commune by planting a double row of poplars along the ditch on either side of the way. The trees are already almost worth a fortune, and they make our road look like a king's highway. It is almost always dry, by reason of its position, and it was so well made that the annual cost of maintaining it is a bare two hundred francs. I must show it to you, for you cannot have seen it ; you must have come by the picturesque way along the valley bottom, a road which the people decided to make for themselves three years later, so as to connect the various farms that were made there at that time. In three years ideas had rooted themselves in the common sense of this township, hitherto so lacking in intelligence that a passing traveler would perhaps have thought it hopeless to attempt to instil them. But to continue :

“The establishment of the basket-maker was an example set before these poverty-stricken folk that they might profit by it. And if the road was to be a direct cause of the future wealth of the canton, all the primary forms of industry must be stimulated, or these two germs of a better state of things would come to nothing. My own work went forward by slow degrees, as I helped my osier farmer and wicker-worker and saw to the making of the road.

“I had two horses, and the timber merchant, the deputy-mayor, had three. He could only have them shod whenever he went over to Grenoble, so I induced a farrier to take up his abode here, and undertook to find him plenty of work. On the same day I met with a discharged soldier, who had nothing but his pension of a hundred francs, and was suffi-

ciently perplexed about his future. He could read and write, so I engaged him as secretary to the mayor; as it happened, I was lucky enough to find a wife for him, and his dreams of happiness were fulfilled.

"Both of these new families needed houses, as well as the basket-maker and twenty-two others from the crétin village; soon afterwards twelve more households were established in the place. The workers in each of these families were at once producers and consumers. They were masons, carpenters, joiners, slaters, blacksmiths, and glaziers; and there was work enough to last them for a long time, for had they not their own houses to build when they had finished those for other people? Seventy, in fact, were built in the commune during my second year of office. One form of production demands another. The additions to the population of the township had created fresh wants, hitherto unknown among these dwellers in poverty. The wants gave rise to industries, and industries to trade, and the gains of trade raised the standard of comfort, which in its turn gave them practical ideas, so justly essential to their prosperity as a community.

"The various workmen wished to buy their bread ready baked, so we came to have a baker. Buckwheat could no longer be the food of a population which, awakened from its lethargy, had become essentially active. They lived on buckwheat when I first came among them, and I wished to effect a change to rye, or a mixture of rye and wheat in the first instance, and finally to see a loaf of white bread even in the poorest household. Intellectual progress to my thinking was entirely dependent on a general improvement in the conditions of life. The presence of a butcher in a district says as much for its intelligence as for its wealth. The worker feeds himself, and a man who feeds himself thinks. I had made a very careful study of the soil, for I foresaw a time when it would be necessary to grow wheat. I was sure of launching the place in a very prosperous agricultural career, and of



doubling the population, when once it had begun to work. And now the time had come.

“M. Gravier, of Grenoble, owned a great deal of land in the commune, which brought him in no rent, but which might be turned into corn-growing land. He is the head of a department in the Prefecture, as you know. It was a kindness for his own countryside quite as much as my earnest entreaties that won him over. He had very benevolently yielded to my importunities on former occasions, and I succeeded in making it clear to him that in so doing he had wrought unconsciously for his own benefit. After several days spent in pleadings, consultation, and talk, the matter was thrashed out. I undertook to guarantee him against all risks in the undertaking, from which his wife, a woman of no imagination, sought to frighten him. He agreed to build four farmhouses with a hundred acres of land attached to each, and promised to advance the sums required to pay for clearing the ground, for seeds, ploughing gear, and cattle, and for making occupation roads.

“I myself also started two farms, quite as much for the sake of bringing my waste land into cultivation as with a view to giving an object-lesson in the use of modern methods in agriculture. In six weeks' time the population of the town increased to three hundred people. Homes for several families must be built on the six farms; there was a vast quantity of land to be broken up; the work called for laborers. Wheelwrights, drainmakers, journeymen and laborers of all kinds flocked in. The road to Grenoble was covered with carts that came and went. All the countryside was astir. The circulation of money had made every one anxious to earn it, apathy had ceased, the place had awakened.

“The story of M. Gravier, one of those who did so much for this canton, can be concluded in a few words. In spite of cautious misgivings, not unnatural in a man occupying an official position in a provincial town, he advanced more than

forty thousand francs, on the faith of my promises, without knowing whether he should ever see them back again. To-day every one of his farms is let for a thousand francs. His tenants have thriven so well that each of them owns at least a hundred acres, three hundred sheep, twenty cows, ten oxen, and five horses, and employs more than twenty persons.

“But to resume: Our farms were ready by the end of the fourth year. Our wheat harvest seemed miraculous to the people in the district, heavy as the first crop off the land ought to be. How often during that year I trembled for the success of my work! Rain or drought might spoil everything by diminishing the belief in me that was already felt. When we began to grow wheat, it necessitated the mill that you have seen, which brings me in about five hundred francs a year. So the peasants say that ‘there is luck about me’ (that is the way they put it), and believe in me as they believe in their relics. These new undertakings—the farms, the mill, the plantations, and the roads—have given employment to all the various kinds of workers whom I had called in. Although the buildings fully represented the value of the sixty thousand francs of capital, which we sunk in the district, the outlay was more than returned to us by the profits on the sales which the consumers occasioned. I never ceased my efforts to put vigor into this industrial life which was just beginning. A nurseryman took my advice and came to settle in the place, and I preached wholesome doctrine to the poor concerning the planting of fruit trees, in order that some day they should obtain a monopoly of the sale of fruit in Grenoble.

“‘You take your cheeses there as it is,’ I used to tell them, ‘why not take poultry, eggs, vegetables, game, hay, and straw, and so forth?’ All my counsels were a source of fortune; it was a question of who should follow them first. A number of little businesses were started; they went on first but slowly, yet from day to day their progress became more rapid; and now sixty carts full of the various products of the district set out

every Monday for Grenoble, and there is more buckwheat grown for poultry food than they used to sow for human consumption. The trade in timber grew to be so considerable that it was subdivided, and since the fourth year of our industrial era, we have had dealers in firewood, squared timber, planks, bark, and later, on, in charcoal. In the end four new sawmills were set up, to turn out the planks and beams of timber.

“When the ex-mayor had acquired a few business notions, he felt the necessity of learning to read and write. He compared the prices that were asked for wood in various neighborhoods, and found such differences in his favor that he secured new customers in one place after another, and now a third of the trade in the department passes through his hands. There has been such a sudden increase in our traffic that we find constant work for three wagon-builders and two harness-makers, each of them employing three hands at least. Lastly, the quantity of ironware that we use is so large that an agricultural implement and tool-maker has removed into the town, and is very well satisfied with the result.

“The desire of gain develops a spirit of ambition, which has ever since impelled our workers to extend their field from the township to the canton, and from the canton to the department, so as to increase their profits by increasing their sales. I had only to say a word to point out new openings to them, and their own sense did the rest. Four years had been sufficient to change the face of the township. When I had come through it first, I did not catch the slightest sound; but in less than five years from that time there were life and bustle everywhere. The gay songs, the shrill or murmuring sounds made by the tools in the workshops rang pleasantly in my ears. I watched the comings and goings of a busy population congregated in the clean and wholesome new town, where plenty of trees had been planted. Every one of them seemed conscious of a happy lot, every face shone with the content that comes through a life of useful toil.

"I look upon these five years as the first epoch of prosperity in the history of our town," the doctor went on after a pause. "During that time I had prepared the ground and sowed the seed in men's minds as well as in the land. Henceforward industrial progress could not be stayed, the population was bound to go forward. A second epoch was about to begin. This little world very soon desired to be better clad. A shoemaker came, and with him a haberdasher, a tailor, and a hatter. This dawn of luxury brought us a butcher and a grocer, and a midwife, who became very necessary to me, for I lost a great deal of time over maternity cases. The stubbed wastes yielded excellent harvests, and the superior quality of our agricultural produce was maintained through the increased supply of manure. My enterprise could now develop itself; everything followed on quite naturally.

"When the houses had been rendered wholesome, and their inmates gradually persuaded to feed and clothe themselves better, I wanted the dumb animals to feel the benefit of these beginnings of civilization. All the excellence of cattle, whether as a race or as individuals, and, in consequence, the quality of the milk and meat, depends upon the care that is expended upon them. I took the sanitation of cowsheds for the text of my sermons. I showed them how an animal that is properly housed and well cared for is more profitable than a lean neglected beast, and the comparison wrought a gradual change for the better in the lot of the cattle in the commune. Not one of them was ill-treated. The cows and oxen were rubbed down as in Switzerland and Auvergne. Sheepfolds, stables, byres, dairies, and barns were rebuilt after the pattern of the roomy, well-ventilated, and consequently healthy steadings that M. Gravier and I had constructed. Our tenants became my apostles. They made rapid converts of unbelievers, demonstrating the soundness of my doctrines by their prompt results. I loaned money to those who needed it, giving the preference to hard-working poor people, because they

served as an example. Any unsound or sickly cattle or beasts of poor quality were quickly disposed of by my advice, and replaced by fine specimens. In this way our dairy produce came, in time, to command higher prices in the market than that sent by other communes. We had splendid herds, and, as a consequence, capital leather.

"This step forward was of great importance, and in this wise: In rural economy nothing can be regarded as trifling. Our hides used to fetch scarcely anything, and the leather we made was of little value, but when once our leather and hides were improved, tanneries were easily established along the waterside. We became tanners, and business rapidly increased.

"Wine, properly speaking, had been hitherto unknown; a thin, sour beverage like verjuice had been their only drink, but now wineshops were established to supply a natural demand. The oldest tavern was enlarged and transformed into an inn, which furnished mules to pilgrims to the Grande Chartreuse who began to come our way, and after two years there was enough business for two innkeepers.

"The justice of the peace died just as our second prosperous epoch began, and, luckily for us, his successor had formerly been a notary in Grenoble who had lost most of his fortune by a bad speculation, though enough of it yet remained to cause him to be looked upon in the village as a wealthy man. It was M. Gravier who induced him to settle among us. He built himself a comfortable house and helped me by uniting his efforts to mine. He also laid out a farm, and broke up and cleaned some of the waste land, and at this moment he has three chalets up above on the mountain side. He has a large family. He dismissed the old registrar and the clerk, and in their place installed better educated men, who worked far harder, moreover, than their predecessors had done. One of the heads of these two new households started a distillery of potato-spirit, and the other was a wool-washer; each combined these occupations with their official work,

and in this way two valuable industries were created among us.

"Now that the commune had some revenues of its own, no opposition was raised in any quarter when they were spent on building a town-hall, with a free school for elementary education in the building and accommodation for a teacher. For this important post I had selected a poor priest who had taken the oath, and had therefore been cast out by the department, and who at last found a refuge among us for his old age. The schoolmistress is a very worthy woman who had lost all that she had, and was in great distress. We made up a nice little sum for her, and she has just opened a boarding-school for girls to which the wealthy farmers hereabouts are beginning to send their daughters.

"If so far, sir, I have been entitled to tell you the story of my own doings as the chronicler of this little spot of earth, I have reached the point when M. Janvier, the new parson, began to divide the work of regeneration with me. He has been a second Fénelon, unknown beyond the narrow limits of a country parish, and by some secret of his own has infused a spirit of brotherliness and of charity among these folk that has made them almost like one large family. M. Dufau, the justice of the peace, was a later comer, but he in an equal degree deserves the gratitude of the people here.

"I will put the whole position before you in figures that will make it clearer than any words of mine. At this moment the commune owns two hundred acres of woodland and a hundred and sixty acres of meadow. Without running up the rates, we give a hundred crowns to supplement the curé's stipend, we pay two hundred francs to the rural policeman, and as much again to the schoolmaster and schoolmistress. The maintenance of the roads costs us five hundred francs, while necessary repairs to the town-hall, the parsonage, and the church, with some few other expenses, also amount to a similar sum. In fifteen years' time there will be a thousand

francs' worth of wood to fell for every hundred francs' worth cut now, and the taxes will not cost the inhabitants a penny. This commune is bound to become one of the richest in France. But perhaps I am taxing your patience, sir?" said Benassis, suddenly discovering that his companion wore such a pensive expression that it seemed as though his attention was wandering.

"No ! no !" answered the commandant.

"Our trade, handicrafts, and agriculture so far only supplied the needs of the district," the doctor went on. "At a certain point our prosperity came to a standstill. I wanted a postoffice, and sellers of tobacco, stationery, powder and shot. The receiver of taxes had hitherto preferred to live elsewhere, but now I succeeded in persuading him to take up his abode in the town, holding out as inducements the pleasantness of the place and of the new society. As time and place permitted I had succeeded in producing a supply of everything for which I had first created a need, in attracting families of hand-working people into the district, and in implanting a desire to own land in them all. So by degrees, as they saved a little money, the waste land began to be broken up ; spade husbandry and small holdings increased ; so did the value of property on the mountain.

"Those struggling folk who, when I knew them first, used to walk over to Grenoble carrying their few cheeses for sale, now made the journey comfortably in a cart, and took fruit, eggs, chickens and turkeys, and before they were aware of it, every one was a little richer. Even those who came off worse had a garden at any rate, and grew early vegetables and fruit. It became the children's work to watch the cattle in the fields, and at last it was found to be a waste of time to bake bread at home. Here were signs of prosperity !

"But if this place was to be a permanent forge of industry, fuel must be constantly added to the fire. The town had not as yet a nascent industry which could maintain this com-

mercial process, an industry which should make great transactions, a warehouse, and a market necessary. It is not enough that a country should lose none of the money that forms its capital; you will not increase its prosperity by more or less ingenious devices for causing this amount to circulate by means of production and consumption, through the greatest possible number of hands. That is not where your problem lies. When a country is fully developed and its production keeps pace with its consumption, if private wealth is to increase as well as the wealth of the community at large, there must be exchanges with other communities, which will keep a balance on the right side of the balance-sheet. This thought has led states with a limited territorial basis like Tyre, Carthage, Venice, Holland, and England, for instance, to secure the carrying trade. I cast about for some such notion as this to apply to our little world, so as to inaugurate a third commercial epoch. Our town is so much like any other, that our prosperity was scarcely visible to a passing stranger; it was only for me that it was astonishing. The folk had come together by degrees; they themselves were a part of the change, and could not judge of its effects as a whole.

“Seven years had gone by when I met with two strangers, the real benefactors of the place, which perhaps some day they will transform into a large town. One of them is a Tyrolese, an exceedingly clever fellow, who makes rough shoes for country people's wear, and boots for people of fashion in Grenoble as no one can make them, not even in Paris itself. He was a poor strolling musician, who, singing and working, had made his way through Italy; one of those busy Germans who fashion the tools for their own work, and make the instrument that they play upon. When he came to the town he asked if any one wanted a pair of shoes. They sent him to me, and I gave him an order for two pairs of boots, for which he made his own lasts. The foreigner's skill surprised



me. He gave accurate and consistent answers to the questions I put, and his face and manner confirmed the good opinion I had formed of him. I suggested that he should settle in the place, undertaking to assist him in business in every way that I could; in fact, I put a fairly large sum of money at his disposal. He accepted my offer. I had my own ideas in this. The quality of our leather had improved; and why should we not use it ourselves, and before very long make our own shoes at moderate prices?

"It was the basket-maker's business over again on a larger scale. Chance had put an exceedingly clever hard-working man in my way, and he must be retained so that a steady and profitable trade might be given to the place. There is a constant demand for foot-gear, and a very slight difference in price is felt at once by the purchaser.

"This was my reasoning, sir, and fortunately events have justified it. At this time we have five tanyards, each of which has its bark-mill. They take all the hides produced in the department itself, and even draw part of their supply from Provence; and yet the Tyrolese uses more leather than they can produce, and has forty workpeople in his employ!

"I happened on the other man after a fashion no whit less strange, but you might find the story tedious. He is just an ordinary peasant, who discovered a cheaper way of making the great broad-brimmed hats that are worn in this part of the world. He sells them in other cantons, and even sends them into Switzerland and Savoy. So long as the quality and the low prices can be maintained, here are two inexhaustible sources of wealth for the canton, which suggested to my mind the idea of establishing three fairs in the year. The prefect, amazed at our industrial progress, lent his aid in obtaining the royal ordinance which authorized them, and last year we held our three fairs. They are known as far as Savoy as the Shoe Fair and the Hat Fair.

"The head clerk of a notary in Grenoble heard of these changes. He was poor, but he is a well-educated, hard-working young fellow, and Mlle. Gravier was engaged to be married to him. He went to Paris to ask for an authorization to establish himself here as a notary, and his request was granted. As he did not have to pay for his appointment, he could afford to build a house in the market-square of the new town, opposite the house of the justice of the peace. We have a market once a week, and a considerable amount of business is transacted in corn and cattle.

"Next year a druggist surely ought to come among us, and next we want a clockmaker, a furniture dealer, and a bookseller; and so, by degrees, we shall have all the desirable luxuries of life. Who knows but that at last we shall have a number of substantial houses, and give ourselves all the airs of a small city? Education has made such strides that there has never been any opposition made at the council board when I proposed that we should restore our church and build a parsonage; nor when I brought forward a plan for laying out a fine open space, planted with trees, where the fairs could be held, and a further scheme for a survey of the township, so that its future streets should be wholesome, spacious, and wisely planned.

"This is how we came to have nineteen hundred hearths in the place of a hundred and thirty-seven; three thousand head of cattle instead of eight hundred; and for a population of seven hundred, no less than two thousand persons are living in the township, or three thousand, if the people down the valley are included. There are twelve houses belonging to wealthy people in the commune, there are a hundred well-to-do families, and two hundred more which are thriving. The rest have their own exertions to look to. Every one knows how to read and write, and we subscribe to seventeen different newspapers.

"We have poor people still among us—there are far too

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many of them, in fact; but we have no beggars, and there is work enough for all. I have so many patients that my daily round taxes the powers of two horses. I can go anywhere for five miles round at any hour without fear; for if any one was minded to fire a shot at me, his life would not be worth ten minutes' purchase. The undemonstrative affection of the people is my sole gain from all these changes, except the radiant 'Good-day, M. Benassis,' that every one gives me as I pass. You will understand, of course, that the wealth incidentally acquired through my model farms has only been a means and not an end."

"If every one followed your example in other places, sir, France would be great indeed, and might laugh at the rest of Europe!" cried Genestas enthusiastically.

"But I have kept you out here for half an hour," said Benassis; "it is growing dark, let us go in to dinner."

The doctor's house, on the side facing the garden, consists of a ground floor and a single story, with a row of five windows in each; dormer windows also project from the tiled mansard roof. The green-painted shutters are in startling contrast with the gray tones of the wall. A vine wanders along the whole side of the house, a pleasant strip of green like a frieze, between the two stories. A few struggling Bengal roses make shift to live as best they may, half drowned at times by the drippings from the gutterless eaves.

As you enter the large vestibule, the salon lies to your right; it contains four windows, two of which look into the yard, and two into the garden. Ceiling and wainscot are paneled, and the walls are hung with seventeenth century tapestry—pathetic evidence that the room had been the object of the late owner's aspiration, and that he had lavished all that he could spare upon it. The great roomy armchairs, covered with brocaded damask; the old-fashioned gilded candle-sconces above the chimney-piece, and the window curtains with their heavy

tassels, showed that the curé had been a wealthy man. Benassis had made some additions to this furniture, which was not without a character of its own. He had placed two smaller tables, decorated with carved wooden garlands, between the windows on opposite sides of the room, and had put a clock, in a case of tortoise shell, inlaid with copper, upon the mantle-shelf. The doctor seldom occupied the salon; its atmosphere was damp and close, like that of a room that is always kept shut. Memories of the dead curé still lingered about it; the peculiar scent of his tobacco seemed to pervade the corner by the hearth where he had been wont to sit. The two great easy-chairs were symmetrically arranged on either side of the fire, which had not been lighted since the time of M. Gravier's visit; the bright flames from the pine logs lighted the room.

"The evenings are chilly even now," said Benassis; "it is pleasant to see a fire."

Genestas was meditating. He was beginning to understand the doctor's indifference to his every-day surroundings.

"It is surprising to me, sir, that you, who possess real public spirit, should have made no effort to enlighten the government, after accomplishing so much."

Benassis began to laugh, but without bitterness; he said, rather sadly—

"You mean that I should draw up some sort of memorial on various ways of civilizing France? You are not the first to suggest it, sir; M. Gravier has forestalled you. Unluckily, governments cannot be enlightened, and a government which regards itself as a diffuser of light is the least open to enlightenment. What we have done for our canton, every mayor ought, of course, to do for his; the magistrate should work for his town, the sub-prefect for his district, the prefect for the department, and the minister for France, each acting in his own sphere of interest. For the few miles of country road that I persuaded our people to make, another would succeed

in constructing a canal or a highway ; and for my encouragement of the peasants' trade in hats, a minister would emancipate France from the industrial yoke of the foreigner by encouraging the manufacture of clocks in different places, by helping to bring to perfection our iron and steel, our tools and appliances, or by bringing silk or dyer's woad into cultivation.

"In commerce, 'encouragement' does not mean protection. A really wise policy should aim at making a country independent of foreign supply, but this should be effected without resorting to the pitiful shifts of customs duties and prohibitions. Industries must work out their own salvation, competition is the life of trade. A protected industry goes to sleep, and monopoly, like the protective tariff, kills it outright. The country upon which all others depend for their supplies will be the land which will promulgate free trade, for it will be conscious of its power to produce its manufactures at prices lower than those of any of its competitors. France is in a better position to attain this end than England, for France alone possesses an amount of territory sufficiently extensive to maintain a supply of agricultural produce at prices that will enable the worker to live on low wages ; the Administration should keep this end in view, for therein lies the whole modern question. I have not devoted my life to this study, dear sir ; I found my work by accident, and late in the day. Such simple things as these are too slight, moreover, to build into a system ; there is nothing wonderful about them, they do not lend themselves to theories ; it is their misfortune to be merely practically useful. And then work cannot be done quickly. The man who means to succeed in these ways must daily look to find within himself the stock of courage needed for the day, a courage in reality of the rarest kind, though it does not seem hard to practise, and meets with little recognition—the courage of the school-master, who must say the same things over and over again.

We all honor the man who has shed his blood on the battle-field, as you have done ; but we ridicule this other whose life-fire is slowly consumed in repeating the same words to children of the same age. There is no attraction for any of us in obscure well-doing. We know nothing of the civic virtue that led the great men of ancient times to serve their country in the lowest rank whenever they did not command. Our age is afflicted with a disease that makes each of us seek to rise above his fellows, and there are more saints than shrines among us.

“ This is how it has come to pass. The Monarchy fell, and we lost honor, Christian virtue faded with the religion of our forefathers, and our own ineffectual attempts at government have destroyed patriotism. Ideas can never utterly perish, so these beliefs linger on in our midst, but they do not influence the great mass of the people, and society has no support but egoism. Every individual believes in himself. For us the future means egoism ; further than that we cannot see. The great man who shall save us from the shipwreck which is imminent will no doubt avail himself of individualism when he makes a nation of us once more ; but until this regeneration comes, we bide our time in a materialistic and utilitarian age. Utilitarianism—to this conclusion have we come. We are all rated, not at our just worth, but according to our social importance. People will scarcely look at an energetic man if he is in shirt-sleeves. The government itself is pervaded by this idea. A minister sends a paltry medal to a sailor who has saved a dozen lives at the risk of his own, while the deputy who sells his vote to those in power receives the Cross of the Legion of Honor.

“ Woe to a people made up of such men as these ! For nations, like men, owe all the strength and vitality that is in them to noble thoughts and aspirations, and men’s feelings shape their faith. But when self-interest has taken the place of faith, and each one of us thinks only of himself, and believes in himself

alone, how can you expect to find among us much of that civil courage whose very essence consists in self-renunciation? The same principle underlies both military and civil courage, although you soldiers are called upon to yield your lives up once and for all, while ours are given slowly drop by drop, and the battle is the same for both, although it takes different forms.

“The man who would fain civilize the lowliest spot on earth needs something besides wealth for the task. Knowledge is still more necessary; and knowledge, and patriotism, and integrity are worthless unless they are accompanied by a firm determination on his part to set his own personal interests completely aside, and to devote himself to a social idea. France, no doubt, possesses more than one well-educated man and more than one patriot in every commune; but I am fully persuaded that not every canton can produce a man who to these valuable qualifications unites the unflinching will and pertinacity with which a blacksmith hammers out iron.

“The destroyer and the builder are two manifestations of will: the one prepares the way, and the other accomplishes the work; the first appears in the guise of a spirit of evil, and the second seems like the spirit of good. Glory falls to the destroyer, while the builder is forgotten; for evil makes a noise in the world that rouses little souls to admiration, while good deeds are slow to make themselves heard. Self-love leads us to prefer the more conspicuous part. If it should happen that any public work is undertaken without an interested motive, it will only be by accident, until the day when education has changed our ways of regarding things in France.

“Yet suppose that this change had come to pass, and that all of us were public-spirited citizens; in spite of our comfortable lives among trivialities, should we not be in a fair way to become the most wearied, wearisome, and unfortunate race of Philistines under the sun?

"I am not at the helm of state, the decision of great questions of this kind is not within my province; but, setting these considerations aside, there are other difficulties in the way of laying down hard and fast rules as to government. In the matter of civilization, everything is relative. Ideas that suit one country admirably are fatal in another—men's minds are as various as the soils of the globe. If we have so often been ill governed, it is because a faculty for government, like taste, is the outcome of a very rare and lofty attitude of mind. The qualifications for the work are found in a natural bent of the soul rather than in the possession of scientific formulæ. No one need fear, however, to call himself a statesman, for his actions and motives cannot be justly estimated; his real judges are far away, and the results of his deeds are even more remote. We have a great respect here in France for men of ideas—a keen intellect exerts a great attraction for us; but ideas are of little value where a resolute will is the one thing needful. Administration, as a matter of fact, does not consist in forcing more or less wise methods and ideas upon the great mass of the nation, but in giving to the ideas, good or bad, that they already possess a practical turn which will make them conduce to the general welfare of the state. If old-established prejudices and customs bring a country into a bad way, the people will renounce their errors of their own accord. Are not losses the result of economical errors of every kind? And is it not, therefore, to every one's interest to rectify them in the long-run?

"Luckily I found a blank tablet in this district. They have followed my advice, and the land is well cultivated; but there had been no previous errors in agriculture, and the soil was good to begin with, so that it has been easy to introduce the five-ply shift, artificial grasses, and potatoes. My methods did not clash with the people's prejudices. The faultily constructed ploughshares in use in some parts of France were unknown here, the hoe sufficed for the little field work that they



did. Our wheelwright extolled my wheeled ploughs because he wished to increase his own business, so I secured an ally in him ; but in this matter, as in all others, I sought to make the good of one conduce to the good of all.

“ Then I turned my attention to another kind of production, that should increase the welfare rather than the wealth of these poor folk. I have brought nothing from without into this district ; I have simply encouraged the people to seek beyond its limits for a market for their produce, a measure that could not but increase their prosperity in a way that they felt immediately. They had no idea of the fact, but they themselves were my apostles, and their works preached my doctrines. Something else must also be borne in mind. We are barely five leagues from Grenoble. There is plenty of demand in a large city for produce of all kinds, but not every commune is situated at the gates of a city. In every similar undertaking, the nature, situation, and resources of the country must be taken into consideration, and a careful study must be made of the soil, of the people themselves, and of many other things ; and no one should expect to have vines grow in Normandy. So no tasks can be more various than those of government, and its general principles must be few in number. The law is uniform, but not so the land and the minds and customs of those who dwell in it ; and the administration of the law is the art of carrying it out in such a manner that no injury is done to people's interests. Every place must be considered separately.

“ On the other side of the mountain, at the foot of which our deserted village lies, they find it impossible to use wheeled ploughs, because the soil is not deep enough. Now if the mayor of the commune were to take it into his head to follow in our footsteps, he would be the ruin of his neighborhood. I advised him to plant vineyards ; they had a capital vintage last year in the little district, and their wine is exchanged for our corn.

"Then, lastly, it must be remembered that my words carried a certain weight with the people to whom I preached, and that we were continually brought into close contact. I cured my peasants' complaints; an easy task, for a nourishing diet is, as a rule, all that is needed to restore them to health and strength. Either through thrift, or through sheer poverty, the country people starve themselves; any illness among them is caused in this way, and as a rule they enjoy very fair health.

"When I first decided to devote myself to this life of obscure renunciation, I was in doubt for a long while whether to become a curé, a country doctor, or a justice of the peace. It is not without reason that people speak collectively of the priest, the lawyer, and the doctor as 'men of the black robe'—so the saying goes. The first heals the wounds of the soul, the second those of the purse, and the third those of the body. They represent the three principal elements necessary to the existence of society—conscience, property, and health. At one time the first, and at a later period the second was all-important in the state. Our predecessors on this earth thought, perhaps not without reason, that the priest, who prescribed what men should think, ought to be paramount; so the priest was king, pontiff, and judge in one, for in those days belief and faith were everything. All this has been changed in our day; and we must even take our epoch as we find it. But I, for one, believe that the progress of civilization and the welfare of the people depend on these three men. They are the three powers who bring home to the people's minds the ways in which facts, interests, and principles affect them. They themselves are three great results produced in the midst of the nation by the operation of events, by the ownership of property, and by the growth of ideas. Time goes on and brings changes to pass, property increases or diminishes in men's hands, all the various readjustments have to be duly regulated, and in this way principles of social order are established. If civilization is to spread itself, and production is

to be increased, the people must be made to understand the way in which the interests of the individual harmonize with national interests which resolve themselves into facts, interests, and principles. As these three professions are bound to deal with these issues of human life, it seemed to me that they must be the most powerful civilizing agencies of our time. They alone afford to a man of wealth the opportunity of mitigating the fate of the poor, with whom they daily bring him in contact.

"The peasant is always more willing to listen to the man who lays down rules for saving him from bodily ills than to the priest who exhorts him to save his soul. The first speaker can talk of this earth, the scene of the peasant's labors, while the priest is bound to talk to him of heaven, with which, unfortunately, the peasant nowadays concerns himself very little indeed; I say unfortunately, because the doctrine of a future life is not only a consolation, but a means by which men may be governed. Is not religion the one power that sanctions social laws? We have but lately vindicated the existence of God. In the absence of a religion, the government was driven to invent 'The Terror,' in order to carry its laws into effect; but the terror was the fear of man, and it has passed away.

"When a peasant is ill, when he is forced to lie on his pallet, and while he is recovering, he cannot help himself, he is forced to listen to logical reasoning, which he can understand quite well if it is put clearly before him. This thought made a doctor of me. My calculations for the peasants were made along with them. I never gave advice unless I was quite sure of the results, and in this way compelled them to admit the wisdom of my views. The people require infallibility. Infallibility was the making of Napoleon; he would have been a god if he had not filled the world with the sound of his fall at Waterloo. If Mahomet founded a permanent religion after conquering the third part of the globe, it was by

dint of concealing his deathbed from the crowd. The same rules hold good for the great conqueror and for the provincial mayor, and a nation or a commune is much the same sort of crowd; indeed, the great multitude of mankind is the same everywhere.

"I have been exceedingly firm with those whom I have helped with money; if I had not been inflexible on this point, they all would have laughed at me. Peasants, no less than worldlings, end by despising the man that they can deceive. He has been cheated. Clearly, then, he must have been weak; and it is might alone that governs the world. I have never charged a penny for my professional advice, except to those who were evidently rich people; but I have not allowed the value of my services to be overlooked at all, and I always make them pay for medicine unless the patient is exceedingly poor. If my peasants do not pay me in money, they are quite aware that they are in my debt; sometimes they satisfy their consciences by bringing oats for my horses, or corn, when it is cheap. But if the miller were to send me some eels as a return for my advice, I should tell him that he is too generous for such a small matter. My politeness bears fruit. In the winter I shall have some sacks of flour for the poor. Ah! sir, they have kind hearts, these people, if one does not slight them, and to-day I think more good and less evil of them than I did formerly."

"What a deal of trouble you have taken!" said Genestas.

"Not at all," answered Benassis. "It was no more trouble to say something useful than to chatter about trifles; and whether I chatted or joked, the talk always turned on them and their concerns wherever I went. They would not listen to me at first. I had to overcome their dislikes; I belonged to the middle classes—that is to say, I was a natural enemy. I found the struggle amusing. An easy or an uneasy conscience—that is all the difference that lies between doing well or ill; the trouble is the same in either case. If

scoundrels would but behave themselves properly, they might be millionaires instead of being hanged. That is all."

"The dinner is growing cold, sir!" cried Jacquotte, in the doorway.

Genestas caught the doctor's arm.

"I have only one comment to offer on what I have just heard," he remarked. "I am not acquainted with any account of the wars of Mahomet, so that I can form no opinions as to his military talents; but if you had only watched the Emperor's tactics during the campaign in France, you might well have taken him for a god; and if he was beaten on the field of Waterloo, it was because he was more than mortal, it was because the earth found his weight too heavy to bear, and sprang from under his feet! On every other subject I entirely agree with you, and God's thunder! whoever hatched you did a good day's work."

"Come," exclaimed Benassis with a smile, "let us sit down to dinner."

The walls of the dining-room were paneled from floor to ceiling, and painted gray. The furniture consisted of a few straw-bottomed chairs, a sideboard, some cupboards, a stove, and the late owner's celebrated clock; there were white curtains in the window, and a white cloth on the table, about which there was no sign of luxury. The dinner service was of plain white earthenware; the soup, made after the traditions of the late curé, was the most concentrated kind of broth that was ever set to simmer by any mortal cook. The doctor and his guest had scarcely finished it when a man rushed into the kitchen, and, in spite of Jacquotte, suddenly invaded the dining-room. He showed evident signs of agitation and fright.

"Well, what is it?" asked the doctor.

"It is this, sir. The mistress, our Mme. Vigneau, has turned as white as white can be, so that we are frightened about her."

"Oh, well, then," Benassis said cheerfully, "I must leave the table," and he rose to go.

In spite of the doctor's entreaties, Genestas flung down his table-napkin, and swore in soldierly fashion that he would not finish his dinner without his host. He returned indeed to the salon; and as he warmed himself by the fire, he thought over the troubles that no man may escape, the troubles that are found in every lot that it falls to man to endure here upon earth.

Benassis soon came back, and the two future friends sat down again.

"Taboureau has just come up to speak to you," said Jacquotte to her master, as she brought in the dishes that she had kept hot for them.

"Who can be ill at his place?" asked the doctor.

"No one is ill, sir. I think from what he said that it is some matter of his own that he wants to ask you about; he is coming back again."

"Very good. This Taboureau," Benassis went on, addressing Genestas, "is for me a whole philosophical treatise; take a good look at him when he comes, he is sure to amuse you. He was a laborer, a thrifty hard-working man, eating little and getting through a great deal of work. As soon as the rogue came to have a few crowns of his own, his intelligence began to develop; he watched the progress which I had originated in this little district with an eye to his own profit. He has made quite a fortune in eight years' time; that is to say, a fortune for our part of the world. Very likely he may have a couple of score thousand francs by now. But if I were to give you a thousand guesses, you would never find out how he made the money. He is a usurer, and his scheme of usury is so profoundly and so cleverly based upon the requirements of the whole canton that I should merely waste my time if I were to take it upon myself to undeceive them as to the benefits which they reap,

in their own opinion, from their dealings with Taboureau. When this devil of a fellow saw every one cultivating his own plot of ground, he hurried about buying grain so as to supply the poor with the requisite seed. Here, as everywhere else, the peasants and even some of the farmers had no ready money with which to pay for seed. To some, Master Taboureau would lend a sack of barley, for which he was to receive a sack of rye at harvest-time, and to others a measure of wheat for a sack of flour. At the present day the man has extended this curious business of his all over the department ; and unless something happens to prevent him, he will go on and very likely make a million. Well, my dear sir, Taboureau the laborer, an obliging, hard-working, good-natured fellow, used to lend a helping hand to any one who asked him ; but as his gains have increased *Monsieur* Taboureau has become litigious, arrogant, and somewhat given to sharp practice. The more money he makes, the worse he grows. The moment that the peasant forsakes his life of toil pure and simple for the leisured existence of the landowning classes, he becomes intolerable. There is a certain kind of character, partly virtuous, partly vicious, half-educated, half-ignorant, which will always be the despair of governments. You will see an example of it in Taboureau. He looks simple, and even doltish ; but when his interests are in question, he is certainly profoundly clever."

A heavy footstep announced the approach of the grain lender.

"Come in, Taboureau !" cried Benassis.

Thus forewarned by the doctor, the commandant scrutinized the peasant in the doorway. Taboureau was decidedly thin, and stooped a little. He had a bulging forehead covered with wrinkles, and a cavernous face, in which two small gray eyes with a dark spot in either of them seemed to be pierced rather than set. The lines of the miser's mouth were close and firm, and his narrow chin turned up to meet an ex-

aggreratedly hooked nose. His hair was turning gray already, and deep furrows which converged above the prominent cheek-bones spoke of the wily shrewdness of a horse dealer and of a life spent in journeying about. He wore a blue coat in fairly clean condition, the square side-pocket flaps stuck out above his hips, and the skirts of the coats hung loose in front, so that a white-flowered waistcoat was visible. There he stood firmly planted on both feet, leaning upon a thick stick with a knob at the end of it. A little spaniel had followed the grain dealer, in spite of Jacquotte's efforts, and was crouching beside him.

"Well, what is it!" Benassis asked as he turned to this being.

Taboureau gave a suspicious glance at the stranger seated at the doctor's table, and said—

"It is not a case of illness, *M. le Maire*, but you understand how to doctor the ailments of the purse just as well as those of the body. We have had a little difficulty with a man over at Saint Laurent, and I have come to ask your advice about it."

"Why not see the justice of the peace or his clerk?"

"Oh, because you are so much cleverer, sir, and I shall feel more sure about my case if I can have your countenance."

"My good Taboureau, I am willing to give medical advice to the poor without charging for it; but I cannot look into the lawsuits of a man who is as wealthy as you are for nothing. It costs a good deal to acquire that kind of knowledge."

Taboureau began to twist his hat about.

"If you want my advice, in order to save the hard coin you would have to pay to the lawyer folk over in Grenoble, you must send a bag of rye to the widow Martin, the woman who is bringing up the charity children."

"*Dame!* I will do it with all my heart, sir, if you think it necessary. Can I talk about this business of mine without



troubling the gentleman there?" he added, with a look at Genestas.

The doctor nodded, so Taboureau went on.

"Well, then, sir, two months ago a man from Saint Laurent came over here to find me. 'Taboureau,' said he to me, 'could you sell me a hundred and thirty-seven measures of barley?' 'Why not?' says I, 'that is my trade. Do you want it immediately?' 'No,' he says, 'I want it for the beginning of spring, in March.' So far, so good. Well, we drive our bargain, and we drink a glass, and we agree that he is to pay me the price that barley fetched at Grenoble last market-day, and I am to deliver it in March. I am to warehouse it at owner's risk, and no allowance for shrinkage, of course. But barley goes up and up, my dear sir; the barley rises like boiling milk. Then I am hard up for money, and I sell my barley. Quite natural, sir, was it not?"

"No," said Benassis, "the barley had passed out of your possession, and you were only warehousing it. And suppose the barley had gone down in value, would you not have compelled your buyer to take it at the price you agreed upon?"

"But very likely he would not have paid me, sir. One must look out for oneself! The seller ought to make a profit when the chance comes in his way; and, after all, the goods are not yours until you have paid for them. That is so, Monsieur l'Officier, is it not? For you can see that the gentleman has been in the army."

"Taboureau," Benassis said sternly, "ill luck will come to you. Sooner or later God punishes ill deeds. How can you, knowing as much as you do, a capable man, moreover, and a man who conducts his business honorably, set examples of dishonesty to the canton? If you allow such proceedings as this to be taken against you, how can you expect that the poor will remain honest people and will not rob you? Your laborers will cheat you out of part of their working hours, and every one here will be demoralized. You are in the

wrong. Your barley was as good as delivered. If the man from Saint Laurent had fetched it himself, you would not have gone there to take it away from him ; you have sold something that was no longer yours to sell, for your barley had already been turned into money which was to be paid down at the stipulated time. But go on."

Genestas gave the doctor a significant glance, to call his attention to Taboureau's impassive countenance. Not a muscle had stirred in the usurer's face during this reprimand ; there was no flush on his forehead, and no sign of emotion in his little eyes.

"Well, sir, I am called upon to supply the barley at last winter's price. Now *I* consider that I am not bound to do so."

"Look here, Taboureau, deliver that barley and be very quick about it, or make up your mind to be respected by nobody in future. Even if you gained the day in a case like this, you would be looked upon as an unscrupulous man who does not keep to his word, and is not bound by promises, or by honor, or——"

"Go on, there is nothing to be afraid of ; tell me that I am a scamp, a scoundrel, a thief outright. You can say things like that in business without insulting anybody, M. le Maire. 'Tis each for himself in business, you know," coolly responded Taboureau.

"Well, then, why deliberately put yourself in a position in which you deserve to be called by such names?"

"But if the law is on my side, sir?"

"But the law will certainly *not* be on your side."

"Are you quite sure about it, sir? Certain sure? For you see it is an important matter."

"Certainly I am. Quite sure. If I were not at dinner, I would have down the code, and you should see for yourself. If the case comes on, you will lose it, and you will never set foot in my house again, for I do not wish to receive people

whom I do not respect. Do you understand? You will lose your case."

"Oh! no, not at all, I shall not lose it, sir," said Tabour-eau. "You see, sir, it is this way: it is the man from Saint Laurent who owes *me* the barley; I bought it of him, and now he refuses to deliver it. I just wanted to make quite certain that I should gain my case before going to any expense at the court about it."

Genestas and the doctor exchanged glances; each concealed his amazement at the ingenious device by which the man sought to learn the truth about this point of law.

"Very well, Taboureaux, your man is a swindler; you should not make bargains with such people."

"Ah! sir, they understand business, those people do."

"Good-bye, Taboureaux."

"Your servant, gentlemen."

"Well, now," remarked Benassis, when the usurer had gone, "if that fellow were in Paris, do you not think that he would be a millionaire before very long?"

After dinner, the doctor and his visitor went back to the salon, and all the rest of the evening until bedtime they talked about war and politics; Genestas evincing a most violent dislike of the English in the course of conversation.

"May I know whom I have the honor of entertaining as a guest?" asked the doctor.

"My name is Pierre Bluteau," answered Genestas; "I am a captain stationed at Grenoble."

"Very well, sir. Do you care to adopt M. Gravier's plan? In the morning after breakfast he liked to go on my rounds with me. I am not at all sure that you will find anything to interest you in the things that occupy me—they are so very commonplace. For, after all, you own no land about here, nor are you the mayor of the place, and you will see nothing in the canton that you cannot see elsewhere; one thatched cottage is just like another. Still you will be in the

open air, and you will have something to take you out of doors."

"No proposal could give me more pleasure. I did not venture to make it myself, lest I should thrust myself upon you."

Commandant Genestas (who shall keep his own name in spite of the fictitious appellation which he had thought fit to give himself) followed his host to a room on the first floor above the salon.

"That is right," said Benassis, "Jacquotte has lighted a fire for you. If you want anything, there is a bell-pull close to the head of the bed."

"I am not likely to want anything, however small, it seems to me," exclaimed Genestas. "There is even a bootjack. Only an old trooper knows what a bootjack is worth? There are times, when one is out on a campaign, sir, when one is ready to burn down a house to come by a knave of a bootjack. After a few marches, one on the top of another, or, above all, after an engagement, there are times when a swollen foot and the soaked leather will not part company, pull as you will; I have had to lie down in my boots more than once. One can put up with the annoyance so long as one is by oneself."

The commandant's wink gave a kind of profound slyness to his last utterance; then he began to make a survey. Not without surprise, he saw that the room was neatly kept, comfortable, and almost luxurious.

"What splendor," was his comment. "Your own room must be something wonderful."

"Come and see," said the doctor. "I am your neighbor, there is nothing but the staircase between us."

Genestas was again surprised when he entered the doctor's room, a bare-looking apartment with no adornment on the walls save an old-fashioned wall paper of a yellowish tint with a pattern of brown roses over it; the color had gone in patches here and there. There was a roughly-painted iron bedstead,

two gray cotton curtains were suspended from a wooden bracket above it, and a threadbare strip of carpet lay at the foot; it was like a bed in a hospital. By the bed-head stood a rickety cupboard on four feet with a door that continually rattled with a sound like castanets. Three chairs and a couple of straw-bottomed armchairs stood about the room, and on a low chest of drawers in walnut wood stood a basin, and an ewer of obsolete pattern with a lid, which was kept in place by a leaden rim round the top of the vessel. This completed the list of the furniture.

The grate was empty. All the apparatus required for shaving lay about in front of an old mirror suspended above the painted stone chimney-piece by a bit of string. The floor was clean and carefully swept, but it was worn and splintered in various places, and there were hollows in it here and there. Gray cotton curtains bordered with a green fringe adorned the two windows. The scrupulous cleanliness maintained by Jacquotte gave a certain air of distinction to this picture of simplicity, but everything in it, down to the round table littered with stray papers, and the very pens on the writing desk, gave the idea of an almost monastic life—a life so wholly filled with thought and feeling of a wider kind that outward surroundings had come to be matters of no moment. An open door allowed the commandant to see a smaller room, which doubtless the doctor seldom occupied. It was scarcely kept in the same condition as the adjoining apartment; a few dusty books lay strewn about over the no less dusty shelves, and from the rows of labeled bottles it was easy to guess that the place was devoted rather to the dispensing of drugs than to scientific studies.

“Why this difference between your room and mine, you will ask?” said Benassis. “Listen a moment. I have always blushed for those who put their guests in the attics, who furnish them with mirrors that distort everything to such a degree that any one beholding himself might think that he

was smaller or larger than nature made him, or suffering from an apoplectic stroke or some other bad complaint. Ought we not to do our utmost to make a room as pleasant as possible during the time that our friend can be with us? Hospitality, to my thinking, is a virtue, a pleasure, and a luxury; but in whatever light it is considered, nay, even if you regard it as a speculation, ought not our guest or our friend to be made much of? Ought not every refinement of luxury to be reserved for him?

“So the best furniture is put into your room, where a thick carpet is laid down; there are hangings on the walls, and a clock and wax candles; and for you Jacquotte will do her best, she has no doubt brought a night-light, and a pair of new slippers and some milk, and her warming-pan too for your benefit. I hope that you will find that luxurious arm-chair the most comfortable seat you have ever sat in, it was a discovery of the late curé's; I do not know where he found it, but it is a fact that if you wish to meet with the perfection of comfort, beauty, or convenience, you must ask counsel of the Church. Well, I hope that you will find everything in your room to your liking. You will find some good razors and excellent soap, and all the trifling details that make one's own home so pleasant. And if my views on the subject of hospitality should not at once explain the difference between your room and mine, to-morrow, M. Bluteau, you will arrive at a wonderfully clear comprehension of the bareness of my room and the untidy condition of my study, when you see all the continual comings and goings here. Mine is not an indoor life, to begin with. I am almost always out of the house, and, if I stay at home, peasants come in at every moment to speak to me. My body and soul and house are all theirs. Why should I worry about social conventions in these matters, or trouble myself over the damage unintentionally done to floors and furniture by these worthy folk? Such things cannot be helped. Luxury properly belongs to

the boudoir and the guest-chamber, to great houses and châteaux. In short, as I scarcely do more than sleep here, what do I want with the superfluities of wealth? You do not know, moreover, how little I care for anything in this world."

They wished each other a friendly good-night with a warm shake of the hand, and went to bed. But before the commandant slept, he came to more than one conclusion as to the man who hour by hour grew greater in his eyes.



## A DOCTOR'S ROUND.

THE first thing next morning Genestas went to the stable, drawn thither by the affection that every man feels for the horse that he rides. Nicolle's method of rubbing down the animal was quite satisfactory.

"Up already, Commandant Bluteau?" cried Benassis, as he came upon his guest. "You hear the drum beat in the morning wherever you go, even in this country! You are a regular soldier!"

"Are you all right?" replied Genestas, holding out his hand with a friendly gesture.

"I am never really all right," answered Benassis, half-mer- rily, half-sadly.

"Did you sleep well, sir?" inquired Jacquotte.

"Faith, yes, my beauty; the bed as you made it was fit for a queen."

Jacquotte's face beamed as she followed her master and his guest, and when she had seen them seat themselves at table, she remarked to Nicolle—

"He is not a bad sort, after all, that officer gentleman."

"I am sure he is not, he has given me two francs already."

"We will begin to-day by calling at two places where there have been deaths," Benassis said to his visitor as they left the dining-room. "Although doctors seldom deign to confront their supposed victims, I will take you round to the two houses, where you will be able to make some interesting observations of human nature; and the scenes to which you will be a witness will show you that in the expression of their feelings our folk among the hills differ greatly from the dwellers in the lowlands. Up among the mountain peaks in



our canton they cling to customs that bear the impress of an older time, and that vaguely recall scenes in the Bible. Nature has traced out a line over our mountain ranges; the whole appearance of the country is different on either side of it. You find strength of character up above, flexibility and quickness of perception below; they have larger ways of regarding things among the hills, while the bent of the lowlands is always towards the material interests of existence. I have never seen a difference so strongly marked, unless it has been in the Val d'Ajou, where the northern side is peopled by a tribe of idiots, and the southern by an intelligent race. There is nothing but a stream in the valley bottom to separate these two populations, which are utterly dissimilar in every respect, as different in face and stature as in manners, customs and occupation. A fact of this kind should compel those who govern a country to make very extensive studies of local differences before passing laws that are to affect the great mass of the people. But the horses are ready, let us start!"

In a short time the two horsemen reached a house in a part of the township that was overlooked by the mountains of the Grande Chartreuse. Before the door of the dwelling, which was fairly clean and tidy, they saw a coffin, set upon two chairs, and covered with a black pall. Four tall candles stood about it, and on a stool near by there was a shallow brass dish full of holy water, in which a branch of green boxwood was steeping. Every passer-by went into the yard, knelt by the side of the dead, said a *Paternoster*, and sprinkled a few drops of holy water on the bier. Above the black cloth that covered the coffin rose the green sprays of a jessamine that grew beside the doorway, and a twisted vine-shoot, already in leaf, overran the lintel. Even the saddest ceremonies demand that things shall appear to the best advantage, and in obedience to this vaguely-felt requirement a young girl had been sweeping the front of the house. The dead man's eldest son, a young peasant about twenty-two years of age,

stood motionless, leaning against the door-post. The tears in his eyes came and went without falling, or perhaps he furtively brushed them away. Benassis and Genestas saw all the details of this scene as they stood beyond the low wall; they fastened their horses to one of the row of poplar trees that grew along it, and entered the yard just as the widow came out of the byre. A woman carrying a jug of milk was with her, and spoke.

"Try to bear up bravely, my poor Pelletier," she said.

"Ah! my dear, after twenty-five years of life together, it is very hard to lose your man," and her eyes brimmed over with tears. "Will you pay the two *sous*?" she added after a moment, as she held out her hand to her neighbor.

"There now! I had forgotten about it," said the other woman, giving her the coin. "Come, neighbor, don't take on so. Ah! there is M. Benassis!"

"Well, poor mother, how are you going on? A little better?" asked the doctor.

"Well!" she said, as the tears fell fast, "we must go on, all the same, that is certain. I tell myself that my man is out of pain now. He suffered so terribly! But come inside, sir. Jacques, set some chairs for these gentlemen. Come, stir yourself a bit. Lord bless you! if you were to stop there for a century, it would not bring your poor father back again. And now, you will have to do the work of two."

"No, no, good woman, leave your son alone, we will not sit down. You have a boy there who will take care of you, and who is quite fit to take his father's place."

"Go and change your clothes, Jacques," cried the widow; "you will be wanted directly."

"Well, good-bye, mother," said Benassis.

"Your servant, gentlemen."

"Here, you see, death is looked upon as an event for which every one is prepared," said the doctor; "it brings no interruption to the course of family life, and they will not even

wear mourning of any kind. No one cares to be at the expense of it ; they are all either too poor or too parsimonious in the villages hereabouts, so that mourning is unknown in country districts. Yet the custom of wearing mourning is something better than a law or a usage, it is an institution somewhat akin to all moral obligations. But in spite of our endeavors, neither M. Janvier nor I have succeeded in making our peasants understand the great importance of public demonstrations of feeling for the maintenance of social order. These good folk, who have only just begun to think and act for themselves, are slow as yet to grasp the changed conditions which should attach them to these theories. They have only reached those ideas which conduce to economy and physical welfare ; in the future, if some one else carries on this work of mine, they will come to understand the principles that serve to uphold and preserve public order and justice. As a matter of fact, it is not sufficient to be an honest man, you must appear to be honest in the eyes of others. Society does not live by moral ideas alone ; its existence depends upon actions in harmony with those ideas.

“In most country communes, out of a hundred families deprived by death of their head, there are only a few individuals capable of feeling more keenly than the others, who will remember the death for very long ; in a year’s time the rest will have forgotten all about it. Is not this forgetfulness a sore evil ? A religion is the very heart of a nation ; it expresses their feelings and their thoughts, and exalts them by giving them an object ; but unless outward and visible honor is paid to a God, religion cannot exist ; and, as a consequence, human ordinances lose all their force. If the conscience belongs to God and to Him only, the body is amenable to social law. Is it not, therefore, a first step towards atheism to efface every sign of pious sorrow in this way, to neglect to impress on children who are not yet old enough to reflect, and on all other people who stand in need of example,

the necessity of obedience to human law, by openly manifested resignation to the will of Providence, who chastens and consoles, who bestows and takes away worldly wealth? I confess that, after passing through a period of sneering incredulity, I have come during my life here to recognize the value of the rites of religion and of religious observances in the family, and to discern the importance of household customs and domestic festivals. The family will always be the basis of human society. Law and authority are first felt there; there, at any rate, the habit of obedience should be learned. Viewed in the light of all their consequences, the spirit of the family and paternal authority are two elements but little developed as yet in our new legislative system. Yet in the family, the commune, the department, lies the whole of our country. The laws ought therefore to be based on these three great divisions.

"In my opinion, marriages, the birth of infants, and the deaths of heads of households cannot be surrounded with too much circumstance. The secret of the strength of Catholicism, and of the deep root that it has taken in the ordinary life of man, lies precisely in this—that it steps in to invest every important event in his existence with a pomp that is so naïvely touching, and so grand, whenever the priest rises to the height of his mission and brings his office into harmony with the sublimity of Christian doctrine.

"Once I looked upon the Catholic religion as a cleverly exploited mass of prejudices and superstitions, which an intelligent civilization ought to deal with according to its deserts. Here I have discovered its political necessity and its usefulness as a moral agent; here, moreover, I have come to understand its power, through a knowledge of the actual thing which the word expresses. Religion means a bond or tie, and certainly a cult—or, in other words, the outward and visible form of religion is the only force that can bind the various elements of society together and mould them into a

permanent form. Lastly, it was also here that I have felt the soothing influence that religion sheds over the wounds of humanity, and (without going further into the subject) I have seen how admirably it is suited to the fervid temperaments of southern races.

"Let us take the road up the hillside," said the doctor, interrupting himself; "we must reach the plateau up there. Thence we shall look down upon both valleys, and you will see a magnificent view. The plateau lies three thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean; we shall see over Savoy and Dauphiné, and the mountain ranges of the Lyonnais and Rhone. We shall be in another commune, a hill commune, and on a farm belonging to M. Gravier you will see the kind of scene of which I have spoken. There the great events of life are invested with a solemnity which comes up to my ideas. Mourning for the dead is rigorously prescribed. Poor people will beg in order to purchase black clothing, and no one refuses to give in such a case. There are few days in which the widow does not mention her loss; she always speaks of it with tears, and her grief is as deep after ten days of sorrow as on the morning after her bereavement. Manners are patriarchal; the father's authority is unlimited, his word is law. He takes his meals sitting by himself at the head of the table; his wife and children wait upon him, and those about him never address him without using certain respectful forms of speech, while every one remains standing and uncovered in his presence. Men brought up in this atmosphere are conscious of their dignity; to my way of thinking, it is a noble education to be brought up among these customs. And, for the most part, they are upright, thrifty, and hard-working people in this commune. The father of every family, when he is old and past work, divides his property equally among his children, and they support him; that is the usual way here. An old man of ninety, in the last century, who had divided everything he

had among his four children, went to live with each one in turn for three months in the year. As he left the oldest to go to the home of a younger brother, one of his friends asked him, 'Well, are you satisfied with the arrangement?' 'Faith! yes,' the old man answered; 'they have treated me as if I had been their own child.' That answer of his seemed so remarkable to an officer then stationed at Grenoble, that he repeated it in more than one Parisian salon. That officer was the celebrated moralist Vauvenargues, and in this way the beautiful saying came to the knowledge of another writer named Chamfort. Ah! still more forcible phrases are often struck out among us, but they lack a historian worthy of them," concluded Benassis.

"I have come across Moravians and Lollards in Bohemia and Hungary," said Genestas. "They are a kind of people something like your mountaineers, good folk who endure the sufferings of war with angelic patience."

"Men living under simple and natural conditions are bound to be almost alike in all countries. Sincerity of life takes but one form. It is true that a country life often extinguishes thought of a wider kind; but evil propensities are weakened and good qualities are developed by it. In fact, the fewer the numbers of the human beings collected together in a place, the less crime, evil thinking, and general bad behavior will be found in it. A pure atmosphere counts for a good deal in purity of morals."

The two horsemen, who had been climbing the stony road at a foot pace, now reached the level space of which Benassis had spoken. It is a strip of land lying round about the base of a lofty mountain peak, a bare surface of rock with no growth of any kind upon it; deep clefts are riven in its sheer inaccessible sides. The gray crest of the summit towers above the ledge of fertile soil which lies around it, a domain sometimes narrower, sometimes wider, and altogether about a hundred acres in extent. Here, through a vast break in the

line of the hills to the south, the eye sees French Maurienne, Dauphiné, the crags of Savoy, and the far-off mountains of the Lyonnais. Genestas was gazing from this point, over a land that lay far and wide in the spring sunlight, when there arose the sound of a wailing cry.

"Let us go on," said Benassis; "the wail of the dead has begun, that is the name they give to this part of the funeral rites."

On the western slope of the mountain peak, the commandant saw the buildings belonging to a farm of some size. The whole place formed a perfect square. The gateway consisted of a granite arch, impressive in its solidity, which added to the old-world appearance of the buildings with the ancient trees that stood about them, and the growth of plant life on the roofs. The house itself lay at the farther end of the yard. Barns, sheepfolds, stables, cowsheds, and other buildings lay on either side, and in the midst was the great pool where the manure had been laid to rot. On a thriving farm, such a yard as this is usually full of life and movement, but to-day it was silent and deserted. The poultry were shut up, the cattle were all in the byres, there was scarcely a sound of animal life. Both stables and cowsheds had been carefully locked, and a clean path to the house had been swept across the yard. The perfect neatness which reigned in a place where everything as a rule was in disorder, the absence of stirring life, the stillness in so noisy a spot, the calm serenity of the hills, the deep shadow cast by the towering peak—everything combined to make a strong impression on the mind.

Genestas was accustomed to painful scenes, yet he could not help shuddering as he saw a dozen men and women standing weeping outside the door of the great hall. "*The master is dead!*" they wailed; the unison of voices gave appalling effect to the words which they repeated twice during the time required to cross the space between the gateway and the farmhouse door. To this wailing lament succeeded moans from

within the house ; the sound of a woman's voice came through the casements.

"I dare not intrude upon such grief as this," said Genestas to Benassis.

"I always go to visit a bereaved family," the doctor answered, "either to certify the death, or to see that no mischance caused by grief has befallen the living. You need not hesitate to come with me. The scene is impressive, and there will be such a great many people that no one will notice your presence."

As Genestas followed the doctor, he found, in fact, that the first room was full of relations of the dead. They passed through the crowd and stationed themselves at the door of a bedroom that opened out of the great hall which served the whole family for a kitchen and a sitting-room ; the whole colony, it should rather be called, for the great length of the table showed that some forty people lived in the house. Benassis' arrival interrupted the discourse of a tall, simply-dressed woman, with thin locks of hair, who held the dead man's hand in hers in a way that spoke eloquently.

The dead master of the house had been arrayed in his best clothes, and now lay stretched out cold and stiff upon the bed. They had drawn the curtains aside ; the thought of heaven seemed to brood over the quiet face and the white hair—it was like the closing scene of a drama. On either side of the bed stood the children and the nearest relations of the husband and wife. These last stood in a line on either side ; the wife's kin upon the left, and those of her husband on the right. Both men and women were kneeling in prayer, and almost all of them were in tears. Tall candles stood about the bed. The curé of the parish and his assistants had taken their places in the middle of the room, beside the bier. There was something tragical about the scene, with the head of the family lying before the coffin, which was waiting to be closed down upon him for ever.



"Ah!" cried the widow, turning as she saw Benassis, "if the skill of the best of men could not save you, my dear lord, it was because it was ordained in heaven that you should precede me to the tomb! Yes, this hand of yours, that used to press mine so kindly, is cold! I have lost my dear helpmate forever, and our household has lost its beloved head, for truly you were the guide of us all! Alas! there is not one of those who is weeping with me who has not known all the worth of your nature, and felt the light of your soul, but I alone knew all the patience and the kindness of your heart. Oh! my husband, my husband! must I bid you farewell for ever? Farewell to you, our stay and support! Farewell to you, my dear master! And we, your children, for to each of us you gave the same fatherly love, all we, your children, have lost our father!"

The widow flung herself upon the dead body and clasped it in a tight embrace, as if her kisses and the tears with which she covered it could give it warmth again; during the pause, came the wail of the servants—

"*The master is dead!*"

"Yes," the widow went on, "he is dead! Our beloved who gave us our bread, who sowed and reaped for us, who watched over our happiness, who guided us through life, who ruled so kindly among us. *Now* I may speak in his praise, and say that he never caused me the slightest sorrow; he was good and strong and patient. Even while we were torturing him for the sake of his health, so precious to us, 'Let it be, children, it is all no use,' the dear lamb said, just in the same tone of voice with which he had said, 'Everything is all right, friends,' only a few days before. Ah! *grand Dieu!* a few days ago! A few days have been enough to take away the gladness from our house and to darken our lives, to close the eyes of the best, most upright, most revered of men. No one could plough as he could. Night or day he would go about over the mountains, he feared nothing, and when he came

back he had always a smile for his wife and children. Ah! he was our best beloved! It was dull here by the fireside when *he* was away, and our food lost all its relish. Oh! how will it be now, when our guardian angel will be laid away under the earth, and we shall never see him any more? Never any more, dear kinsfolk and friends; never any more, my children! Yes, my children have lost their kind father, our relations and friends have lost their good kinsman and their trusty friend, the household has lost its master, and I have lost everything that made life sweet to me—a kind husband, companion and helpmate!”

She took the hand of the dead again, and knelt, so that she might press her face close to his as she kissed it. The servants' cry, "*The master is dead!*" was again repeated three times.

Just then the eldest son came to his mother to say, "The people from Saint Laurent have just come, mother; we want some wine for them."

"Take the keys," she said in a low tone, and in a different voice from that in which she had just expressed her grief; "you are the master of the house, my son; see that they receive the welcome that your father would have given them; do not let them find any change."

"Let me have one more long look," she went on. "But, alas! my good husband, you do not feel my presence now, I cannot bring back warmth to you! I only wish that I could comfort you still, and let you know that so long as I live you will dwell in the heart that you made glad, could tell you that I shall be happy in the memory of my happiness—that the dear thought of you will live on in this room. Yes, so long as God spares me, this room shall be filled with memories of you. Hear my vow, dear husband! Your couch shall always remain as it is now. I will sleep in it no more, since you are dead; henceforward, while I live, it shall be cold and empty. With you, I have lost all that makes a woman; her

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master, husband, father, friend, companion, and helpmate ; I have lost all !”

“ *The master is dead !* ” the servants wailed. Others raised the cry, and the lament became general. The widow took a pair of scissors that hung at her waist, cut off her hair, and laid the locks in her husband’s hand. Deep silence fell on them all.

“ That act means that she will not marry again,” said Benassis ; “ this determination was expected by many of the relatives.”

“ Take it, dear lord ! ” she said ; her emotion brought a tremor to her voice that went to the hearts of all who heard her. “ I have sworn to be faithful ; I give this pledge to you to keep in the grave. We shall thus be united for ever, and through love of your children I will live on among the family in whom you used to feel yourself young again. Oh ! that you could hear me, my husband ! the pride and joy of my heart ! Oh, that you could know that all my power to live, now you are dead, will yet come from you ; for I shall live to carry out your sacred wishes and to honor your memory.”

Benassis pressed Genestas’ hand as an invitation to follow him, and they went out. By this time the first room was full of people who had come from another mountain commune ; all of them waited in meditative silence, as if the sorrow and grief that brooded over the house had already taken possession of them. As Benassis and the commandant crossed the threshold, they overheard a few words that passed between one of the newcomers and the eldest son of the late owner.

“ Then when did he die ? ”

“ Oh ! ” exclaimed the eldest son, a man of five-and-twenty years of age, “ I did not see him die. He asked for me, and I was not there ! ” His voice was broken with sobs, but he went on : “ He said to me the night before, ‘ You must go over to the town, my boy, and pay our taxes ; my funeral will put that out of your minds, and we shall be behindhand,

a thing that has never happened before.' It seemed the best thing to do, so I went ; and while I was gone he died, and I never received his last embrace. I have always been at his side, but he did not see me near him at the last in my place where I had always been."

"*The master is dead !*"

"Alas ! he is dead, and I was not there to receive his last words and his latest sigh. And what did the taxes matter ? Would it not have been better to lose all our money than to leave home just then ? Could all that we have make up to me for the loss of his last farewell ? No. *Mon Dieu !* If *your* father falls ill, Jean, do not go away and leave him, or you will lay up a lifelong regret for yourself."

"My friend," said Genestas, "I have seen thousands of men die on the battlefield ; death did not wait to let their children bid them farewell ; take comfort, you are not the only one."

"But a father who was such a good man !" he replied, bursting into fresh tears.

Benassis took Genestas in the direction of the farm buildings.

"The funeral oration will only cease when the body has been laid in its coffin," said the doctor, "and the weeping woman's language will grow more vivid and impassioned all the while. But a woman only acquires the right to speak in such a strain before so imposing an audience by a blameless life. If the widow could reproach herself with the smallest of shortcomings, she would not dare to utter a word ; for if she did, she would pronounce her own condemnation, she would be at the same time her own accuser and judge. Is there not something sublime in this custom which thus judges the living and the dead ? They only begin to wear mourning after a week has elapsed, when it is publicly worn at a meeting of all the family. Their near relations spend the week with the widow and children, to help them to set their affairs

in order and to console them. A family gathering at such a time produces a great effect on the minds of the mourners; the consideration for others which possesses men when they are brought into close contact acts as a restraint on violent grief. On the last day, when the mourning garb has been assumed, a solemn banquet is given, and their relations take leave of them. All this is taken very seriously. Any one who was slack in fulfilling his duties after the death of the head of a family would have no one at his own funeral."

The doctor had reached the cowhouse as he spoke; he opened the door and made the commandant enter, that he might show it to him.

"All our cowhouses have been rebuilt after this pattern, captain. Look! Is it not magnificent?"

Genestas could not help admiring the huge place. The cows and oxen stood in two rows, with their tails towards the side walls and their heads in the middle of the shed. Access to the stalls was afforded by a fairly wide space between them and the wall; you could see their horned heads and shining eyes through the lattice work, so that it was easy for the master to run his eyes over the cattle. The fodder was placed on some staging erected above the stalls, so that it fell into the racks below without waste of labor or material. There was a wide-paved space down the centre, which was kept clean, and ventilated by a thorough draught of air.

"In the winter-time," Benassis said, as he walked with Genestas down the middle of the cowhouse, "both men and women do their work here together in the evenings. The tables are set out here, and in this way the people keep themselves warm without going to any expense. The sheep are housed in the same way. You would not believe how quickly the beasts fall into orderly ways. I have often wondered to see them come in; each knows her proper place, and allows those who take precedence to pass in before her. Look! there is just room enough in each stall to do the milking and

to rub the cattle down ; and the floor slopes a little to facilitate drainage."

"One can judge of everything else from the sight of this cowhouse," said Genestas ; "without flattery, these are great results indeed !"

"We have had some trouble to bring them about," Benassis answered ; "but then, see what fine cattle they are !"

"They are splendid beasts certainly ; you had good reason to praise them to me," answered Genestas.

"Now," said the doctor, when he had mounted his horse and passed under the gateway, "we are going over some of the newly-cleared waste, and through the corn land. I have christened this little corner of our commune, 'La Beauce.'"

For about an hour they rode at a foot pace across fields in a state of high cultivation, on which the soldier complimented the doctor ; then they came down the mountain side into the township again, talking whenever the pace of their horses allowed them to do so. At last they reached a narrow glen, down which they rode into the main valley.

"I promised yesterday," Benassis said to Genestas, "to show you one of the two soldiers who left the army and came back to us after the fall of Napoleon. We shall find him somewhere hereabouts, if I am not mistaken. The mountain streams flow into a sort of natural reservoir or tarn up here ; the earth they bring down has silted it up, and he is engaged in clearing it out. But if you are to take any interest in the man, I must tell you his history. His name is Gondrin. He was only eighteen years old when he was drawn in the great conscription of 1792, and drafted into a corps of gunners. He served as a private soldier in Napoleon's campaigns in Italy, followed him to Egypt, and came back from the East after the Peace of Amiens. In the time of the empire he was incorporated in the pontoon troop of the Guard, and was constantly on active service in Germany, lastly the poor fellow made the Russian campaign."

"We are brothers-in-arms then, to some extent," said Genestas; "I have made the same campaigns. Only an iron frame could stand the tricks played by so many different climates. My word for it, those who are still standing on their stumps after marching over Italy, Egypt, Germany, Portugal, and Russia must have applied to Providence and taken out a patent for living."

"Just so, you will see a solid fragment of a man," answered Benassis. "You know all about the retreat from Moscow; it is useless to tell you about it. This man I have told you of is one of the pontooneers of the Beresina; he helped to construct the bridge by which the army made the passage, and stood waist-deep in water to drive in the first piles. General Eblé, who was in command of the pontooneers, could only find forty-two men who were plucky enough, in Gondrin's phrase, to tackle that business. The general himself came down to the stream to hearten and cheer the men, promising each of them a pension of a thousand francs and the Cross of the Legion of Honor. The first who went down into the Beresina had his leg taken off by a block of ice, and the man himself was washed away; but you will better understand the difficulty of the task when you hear the end of the story. Of the forty-two volunteers, Gondrin is the only one alive to-day. Thirty-nine of them lost their lives in the Beresina, and the two others died miserably in a Polish hospital.

"The poor fellow himself only returned from Wilna in 1814, to find the Bourbons restored to power. General Eblé (of whom Gondrin cannot speak without tears in his eyes) was dead. The pontooneer was deaf, and his health was shattered; and as he could neither read nor write, he found no one left to help him or to plead his cause. He begged his way to Paris, and while there made application at the War Office, not for the thousand francs of extra pension which had been promised to him, nor yet for the 'Cross of the Legion of Honor,' but only for the bare pension due to

him after twenty-two years of service, and I do not know how many campaigns. He did not obtain his pension or his traveling expenses; he did not even receive his arrears of pay. He spent a year in making fruitless solicitations, holding out his hands in vain to those whom he had saved; and at the end of it he came back here, sorely disheartened but resigned to his fate. This hero unknown to fame does draining work on the land, for which he is paid ten *sous* the fathom. He is accustomed to working in a marshy soil, and so, as he says, he gets jobs which no one else cares to take. He can make about three francs a day by clearing out ponds, or draining meadows that lie under water. His deafness makes him seem surly, and he is not naturally inclined to say very much, but there is a good deal in him.

"We are very good friends. He dines with me on the day of Austerlitz, on the Emperor's birthday, and on the anniversary of the disaster at Waterloo, and during the dessert he always receives a napoleon to pay for his wine every quarter. Every one in the commune shares in my feeling of respect for him; if he would allow them to support him, nothing would please them better. At every house to which he goes the people follow my example, and show their esteem by asking him to dine with them. It is a feeling of pride that leads him to work, and it is only as a portrait of the Emperor that he can be induced to take my twenty-franc piece. He has been deeply wounded by the injustice that has been done him; but I think regret for the 'Cross' is greater than the desire for his pension.

"He has one great consolation. After the bridges had been constructed across the Beresina, General Eblé presented such of the pontooneers as were not disabled to the Emperor, and Napoleon embraced poor Gondrin—perhaps but for that embrace he would have died ere now. This memory and the hope that some day Napoleon will return are all that Gondrin lives by. Nothing will ever persuade him that Napoleon is dead,



and so convinced is he that the Emperor's captivity is wholly and solely due to the English, that I believe he would be ready on the slightest pretext to take the life of the best-natured alderman that ever traveled for pleasure in foreign parts."

"Let us go on as fast as possible," cried Genestas. He had listened to the doctor's story with rapt attention, and now seemed to recover consciousness of his surroundings. "Let us hurry! I long to see that man!"

Both of them put their horses to a gallop.

"The other soldier that I spoke of," Benassis went on, "is another of those men of iron who have knocked about everywhere with our armies. His life, like that of all French soldiers, has been made up of bullets, sabre strokes, and victories; he has had a very rough time of it, and has only worn the woollen epaulettes. He has a fanatical affection for Napoleon, who conferred the 'Cross' upon him on the field of Valontina. He is of a jovial turn of mind, and like a genuine Dauphinois, has always looked after his own interests, has his pension, and the honors of the Legion. Goguelat is his name. He was an infantry man, who exchanged into the Guard in 1812. He is Gondrin's better half, so to speak, for the two have taken up house together. They both lodge with a peddler's widow, and make over their money to her. She is a kind soul, who boards them and looks after them and their clothes as if they were her children.

"In his quality of local postman, Goguelat carries all the news of the countryside, and a good deal of practice acquired in this way has made him an orator in great request at up-sittings, and the champion teller of stories in the district. Gondrin looks upon him as a very knowing fellow, and something of a wit; and whenever Goguelat talks about Napoleon, his comrade seems to understand what he is saying from the movement of his lips. There will be an up-sitting (as they call it) in one of my barns to-night. If these two come over

to it, and we can manage to see without being seen, I shall treat you to a view of the spectacle. But here we are, close to the ditch, and I do not see my friend the pontooneer."

The doctor and the commandant looked everywhere about them; Gondrin's soldier's coat lay there beside a heap of black mud, and his wheelbarrow, spade, and pickaxe were visible, but there was no sign of the man himself along the various pebbly watercourses, for the wayward mountain streams had hollowed out channels that were almost overgrown with low bushes.

"He cannot be so very far away. Gondrin! Where are you?" shouted Benassis.

Genestas first saw the curling smoke from a tobacco pipe rise among the brushwood on a bank of rubbish not far away. He pointed it out to the doctor, who shouted again. The old pontooneer raised his head at this, recognized the mayor, and came towards them down a little pathway.

"Well, old friend," said Benassis, making a sort of speaking-trumpet with his hand. "Here is a comrade of yours, who was out in Egypt, come to see you."

Gondrin raised his face at once and gave Genestas a swift, keen, and searching look, one of those glances by which old soldiers are wont at once to take the measure of any impending danger. He saw the red ribbon that the commandant wore, and made a silent and respectful military salute.

"If the little corporal were alive," the officer cried, "you would have the Cross of the Legion of Honor and a handsome pension besides, for every man who wore epaulettes on the other side of the river owed his life to you on the 1st of October, 1812. But I am not the minister of war, my friend," the commandant added as he dismounted, and with a sudden rush of feeling he grasped the laborer's hand.

The old pontooneer drew himself up at the words, he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and put it in his pocket.

"I only did my duty, sir," he said, with his head bent

down ; "but others have not done their duty by me. They asked for my papers ! Why, the Twenty-ninth Bulletin, I told them, must do instead of my papers !"

"But you must make another application, comrade. You are bound to have justice done you in these days, if influence is brought to bear in the right quarter."

"Justice !" cried the veteran. The doctor and the commandant shuddered at the tone in which he spoke.

In the brief pause that followed, both the horsemen looked at the man before them, who seemed like a fragment of the wreck of great armies which Napoleon had filled with men of bronze sought out from among three generations. Gondrin was certainly a splendid specimen of that seemingly indestructible mass of men which might be cut to pieces but never gave way. The old man was scarcely five feet high, wide across the shoulders, and broad-chested ; his face was sun-burned, furrowed with deep wrinkles, but the outlines were still firm in spite of the hollows in it, and one could see even now that it was the face of a soldier. It was a rough-hewn countenance ; his forehead seemed like a block of granite ; but there was a weary expression about his face, and the gray hairs hung scantily about his head, as if life were waning there already. Everything about him indicated unusual strength ; his arms were covered thickly with hair, and so was the chest, which was visible through the opening of his coarse shirt. In spite of his almost crooked legs, he held himself firm and erect, as if nothing could shake him.

"Justice," he said once more ; "there never will be justice for the like of us. We cannot send bailiffs to the government to demand our dues for us ; and as the wallet must be filled somehow," he said, striking his stomach, we cannot afford to wait. Moreover, these gentry who lead snug lives in government offices may talk and talk, but their words are not good to eat, so I have come back again here to draw my pay out of the commonalty," he said, striking the mud with his spade.

"Things must not be left in that way, old comrade," said Genestas. "I owe my life to you, and it would be ungrateful of me if I did not lend you a hand. I have not forgotten the passage over the bridges in the Beresina, and it is fresh in the memories of some brave fellows of my acquaintance; they will back me up, and the nation shall give you the recognition you deserve."

"You will be called a Bonapartist! Please do not meddle in the matter, sir. I have gone to the rear now, and I have dropped into my hole here like a spent bullet. But after riding on camels through the desert, and drinking my glass by the fireside in Moscow, I never thought that I should come back to die here beneath the trees that my father planted," and he began to work again.

"Poor old man!" said Genestas, as they turned to go. "I should do the same if I were in his place; we have lost our father. Everything seems dark to me now that I have seen that man's hopelessness," he went on, addressing Benassis; "he does not know how much I am interested in him, and he will think that I am one of those gilded rascals who cannot feel for a soldier's sufferings."

He turned quickly and went back, grasped the veteran's hand, and spoke loudly in his ear—

"I swear by the cross I wear—the cross of honor it used to be—that I will do all that man can do to obtain your pension for you; even if I have to swallow a dozen refusals from the minister, and to petition the King and the Dauphin and the whole shop!"

Old Gondrin quivered as he heard the words. He looked hard at Genestas and said, "Haven't you served in the ranks?" The commandant nodded. The pontooneer wiped his hand and took that of Genestas, which he grasped warmly and said—

"I made the army a present of my life, general, when I waded out into the river yonder, and if I am still alive, it is

all so much to the good. One moment ! Do you care to see to the bottom of it ? Well, then, ever since *somebody* was pulled down from his place, I have ceased to care about anything. And, after all," he went on more cheerfully, as he pointed to the land, "they have made over twenty thousand francs to me here, and I am taking it out in detail, as *he* used to say !"

"Well, then, comrade," said Genestas, touched by the grandeur of this forgiveness," at least you shall have the only thing that you cannot prevent me from giving to you, here below." The commandant tapped his heart, looked once more at the old pontooneer, mounted his horse again, and went his way side by side with Benassis, deeply impressed with the injustice done to his old comrade.

"Such cruelty as this on the part of a government foment the strife between rich and poor," said the doctor. "People who exercise a little brief authority have never given a serious thought to the consequences that must follow an act of injustice done to a man of the people. It is true that a poor man who needs must work for his daily bread cannot long keep up the struggle ; but he can talk, and his words find an echo in every sufferer's heart, so that one bad case of this kind is multiplied, for every one who hears of it feels it as a personal wrong, and the leaven works. Even this is not so serious, but something far worse comes of it. Among the people, these cases of injustice bring about a chronic state of smothered hatred for their social superiors. The middle class becomes the poor man's enemy ; they lie without the bounds of his moral code, he tells lies to them and robs them without scruple ; indeed, theft ceases to be a crime or a misdemeanor, and is looked upon as an act of vengeance.

"When an official, who ought to see that the poor have justice done them, uses them ill and cheats them of their due, how can we expect the poor starving wretches to bear their troubles meekly and to respect the rights of property ? It





*AN OLD LABORER MAKING HIS WAY ALONG THE ROAD IN  
COMPANY WITH AN AGED WOMAN.*





makes me shudder to think that some understrapper, whose business it is to dust papers in a government office, has pocketed Gondrin's promised thousand francs of pension. And yet there are folk who, never having measured the excess of the people's sufferings, accuse the people of excess in the day of their vengeance! When a government has done more harm than good to individuals, its further existence depends on the merest accident, the masses square the account after their fashion by upsetting it. A statesman ought always to imagine Justice with the poor at her feet, for justice was only invented for the poor."

When they had come within the compass of the township Benassis saw two persons walking along the road in front of them, and turned to his companion, who had been absorbed for some time in thought.

"You have seen a veteran soldier resigned to his life of wretchedness, and now you are about to see an old agricultural laborer who is submitting to the same lot. The man there ahead of us has dug and sown and toiled for others all his life."

Genestas looked and saw an old laborer making his way along the road, in company with an aged woman. He seemed to be afflicted with some form of sciatica, and limped painfully along. His feet were encased in a wretched pair of sabots, and a sort of wallet hung over his shoulder. Several tools lay in the bottom of the bag; their handles, blackened with long use and the sweat of toil, rattled audibly together; while the other end of the wallet behind his shoulder held bread, some walnuts, and a few fresh onions. His legs seemed to be warped, as it were; his back was bent by continual toil; he stooped so much as he walked that he leaned on a long stick to steady himself. His snow-white hair escaped from under a battered hat, grown rusty by exposure to all sorts of weather, and mended here and there with visible stitches of white thread. His clothes, made of a kind of rough canvas, were a mass of patches of contrasting colors. This piece of humanity

in ruins lacked none of the characteristics that appeal to our hearts when we see ruins of other kinds.

His wife held herself somewhat more erect. Her clothing was likewise a mass of rags, and the cap that she wore was of the coarsest materials. On her back she carried a rough earthen jar by means of a thong passed through the handles of the great pitcher, which was round in shape and flattened at the sides. They both looked up when they heard the horses approaching, saw that it was Benassis, and stopped.

The man had worked till he was almost past work, and his faithful helpmate was no less broken with toil. It was painful to see how the summer's sun and the winter's cold had blackened their faces and covered them with such deep wrinkles that their features were hardly discernible. It was not their life history that had been engraven on their faces; but it might be gathered from their attitude and bearing. Incessant toil had been the lot of both; they had worked and suffered together; they had had many troubles and few joys to share; and now, like captives grown accustomed to their prison, they seemed to be too familiar with wretchedness to heed it, and to take everything as it came. Yet a certain frank light-heartedness was not lacking in their faces; and on a closer view their monotonous life, the lot of so many a poor creature, wellnigh seemed an enviable one. Trouble had set its unmistakable mark upon them, but petty cares had left no traces there.

"Well, my good Father Moreau, I suppose there is no help for it, and you must always be working?"

"Yes, M. Benassis, there are one or two more bits of waste that I mean to clear for you before I knock off work," the old man answered cheerfully, and a light shone in his little black eyes.

"Is that wine that your wife there is carrying? If you will not take a rest now, you ought at any rate to take wine."

"I take a rest? I should not know what to do with my-

self. The sun and the fresh air put life into me when I am out of doors and busy grubbing up the land. As to the wine, sir, yes, that is wine sure enough, and it is all through your contriving I know that the Mayor at Courteuil lets us have it for next to nothing. Ah, you managed it very cleverly, but, all the same, I know you had a hand in it."

"Oh! come, come! Good-day, mother. You are going to work on that bit of land of Champferlu's to-day of course?"

"Yes, sir; I made a beginning there yesterday evening."

"Capital!" said Benassis. "It must be a satisfaction to you, at times, to see this hillside. You two have broken up almost the whole of the land on it yourselves."

"Lord! yes, sir," answered the old woman, "it has been our doing! We have fairly earned our bread."

"Work, you see, and land to cultivate are the poor man's consols. That good man would think himself disgraced if he went into the poorhouse or begged for his bread; he would choose to die pickaxe in hand, out in the open, in the sunlight. Faith, he bears a proud heart in him. He has worked until work has become his very life; and yet death has no terrors for him! He is a profound philosopher, little as he suspects it. Old Moreau's case suggested the idea to me of founding an almshouse for the country people of the district; a refuge for those who, after working hard all their lives, have reached an honorable old age of poverty.

"I had by no means expected to make the fortune which I have acquired here; indeed, I myself have no use for it, for a man who has fallen from the pinnacle of his hopes needs very little. It costs but little to live, the idler's life alone is a costly one, and I am not sure that the unproductive consumer is not robbing the community at large. There was some discussion about Napoleon's pension after his fall; it came to his ears, and he said that five francs a day and a horse to ride were all that he needed. I meant to have no more to do with money when I came here; but after a time I saw that

money means power, and that it is in fact a necessity, if any good is to be done. So I have made arrangements in my will for turning my house into an almshouse, in which old people who have not Moreau's fierce independence can end their days. Part of the income of nine thousand francs brought in by the mill and the rest of my property will be devoted to giving outdoor relief in hard winters to those who really stand in need of it.

"This foundation will be under the control of the Municipal Council, with the addition of the curé, who is to be president; and in this way the money made in the district will be returned to it. In my will I have laid down the lines on which this institution is to be conducted; it would be tedious to go over them, it is enough to say that I have thought it all out very carefully. I have also created a trust fund, which will some day enable the commune to award several scholarships for children who show signs of promise in art or science. So, even after I am gone, my work of civilization will continue. When you have set yourself to do anything, Captain Bluteau, something within you urges you on, you see, and you cannot bear to leave it unfinished. This craving within us for order and for perfection is one of the signs that point most surely to a future existence. Now, let us quicken our pace, I have my round to finish, and there are five or six more patients still to be visited."

They cantered on for some time in silence, till Benassis said laughingly to his companion, "Come now, Captain Bluteau, you have drawn me out and made me chatter like a magpie, and you have not said a syllable about your own history, which must be an interesting one. When a soldier has come to your time of life, he has seen so much that he must have more than one adventure to tell about."

"Why, my history has been simply the history of the army," answered Genestas. "Soldiers are all after one pattern. Never in command, always giving and taking sabre-cuts in my

place, I have lived just like everybody else. I have been wherever Napoleon led us, and have borne a part in every battle in which the Imperial Guard has struck a blow; but everybody knows all about these events. A soldier has to look after his horse, to endure hunger and thirst at times, to fight whenever there is fighting to be done, and there you have the whole history of his life. As simple as saying good-day, is it not? Then there are battles in which your horse casts a shoe at the outset and lands you in a quandary; and as far as you are concerned, that is the whole of it. In short, I have seen so many countries, that seeing them has come to be a matter of course; and I have seen so many men die that I have come to value my own life at nothing."

"But you yourself must have been in danger at times, and it would be interesting to hear you tell of your personal adventures."

"Perhaps," answered the commandant.

"Well, then, tell me about the adventure that made the deepest impression upon you. Come! do not hesitate. I shall not think that you are wanting in modesty even if you should tell me of some piece of heroism on your part; and when a man is quite sure that he will not be misunderstood, ought he not to find a kind of pleasure in saying, 'I did thus?'"

"Very well, then, I will tell you about something that gives me a pang of remorse from time to time. During fifteen years of warfare it never once happened that I killed a man save in legitimate defence of self. We are drawn up in line, and we charge; and if we do not strike down those before us, they will begin to draw blood without asking leave, so you have to kill if you do not mean to be killed, and your conscience is quite easy. But once I broke a comrade's back; it happened in a singular way, and it has been a painful thing to me to think of afterwards—the man's dying grimace haunts me at times. But you shall judge for yourself.

"It was during the retreat from Moscow," the commandant went on. "The Grand Army had ceased to be itself; we were more like a herd of overdriven cattle. Good-bye to discipline! The regiments had lost sight of their colors, every one was his own master, and the Emperor (one need not scruple to say it) knew that it was useless to attempt to exert his authority when things had gone so far. When we reached Studzianka, a little place on the other side of the Beresina, we came upon human dwellings for the first time after several days. There were barns and peasants' cabins to destroy, and pits full of potatoes and beetroot; the army had been without victuals, and now it fairly ran riot, the first comers, as you might expect, making a clean sweep of everything.

"I was one of the last to come up. Luckily for me, sleep was the one thing that I longed for just then. I caught sight of a barn and went into it. I looked round and saw a score of generals and officers of high rank, all of them men who, without flattery, might be called great. Junot was there, and Narbonne, the Emperor's aide-de-camp, and all the chiefs of the army. There were common soldiers there as well, not one of whom would have given up his bed of straw to a marshal of France. Some who were leaning their backs against the wall had dropped off to sleep where they stood, because there was no room to lie down; others lay stretched out on the floor—it was a mass of men packed together so closely for the sake of warmth, that I looked about in vain for a nook to lie down in. I walked over this flooring of human bodies; some of the men growled, the others said nothing, but no one budged. They would not have moved out of the way of a cannon ball just then; but under the circumstances, one was not obliged to practise the maxims laid down by the child's 'Guide to Manners.' Groping about, I saw at the end of the barn a sort of ledge up in the roof; no one had thought of scrambling up to it, possibly no one had felt equal

to the effort. I clambered up and ensconced myself upon it ; and as I lay there at full length, I looked down at the men huddled together like sheep below. It was a pitiful sight, yet it almost made me laugh. A man here and there was gnawing a frozen carrot, with a kind of animal satisfaction expressed in his face ; and thunderous snores came from generals who lay muffled up in ragged cloaks. The whole barn was lighted by a blazing pine log ; it might have set the place on fire, and no one would have troubled themselves to get up and put it out.

"I lay down on my back, and naturally, just before I dropped off, my eyes traveled to the roof above me, and then I saw that the main beam which bore the weight of the joists was being slightly shaken from east to west. The blessed thing danced about in fine style. 'Gentlemen,' said I, 'one of our friends outside has a mind to warm himself at our expense.' A few moments more and the beam was sure to come down. 'Gentlemen ! gentlemen !' I shouted, 'we shall all be killed in a minute ! Look at the beam there !' and I made such a noise that my bed-fellows woke at last. Well, sir, they all stared up at the beam, and then those who had been sleeping turned round and went off to sleep again, while those who were eating did not even stop to answer me.

"Seeing how things were, there was nothing for it but to get up and leave my place, and run the risk of finding it taken by somebody else, for all the lives of this heap of heroes were at stake. So out I go. I turn the corner of the barn and come upon a great devil of a Würtemberger, who was tugging at the beam with a certain enthusiasm. 'Aho ! aho !' I shouted, trying to make him understand that he must desist from his toil. '*Gehe mir aus dem Gesicht, oder ich schlag dich todt !*' (Get out of my sight, or I will kill you) he cried. 'Ah ! yes, just so, *Que mire aous dem guesit,*' I answered, 'but that is not the point.' I picked up his gun that he had left on the ground, and broke his back with it ; then I turned in



again, and went off to sleep. Now you know the whole business."

"But that was a case of self-defence, in which one man suffered for the good of many, so you have nothing to reproach yourself with," said Benassis.

"The rest of them thought that it had only been my fancy; but fancy or no, a good many of them are living comfortably in fine houses to-day, without feeling their hearts oppressed by gratitude."

"Then would you only do people a good turn in order to receive that exorbitant interest called gratitude?" said Benassis, laughing. "That would be asking a great deal for your outlay."

"Oh, I know quite well that all the merit of a good deed evaporates at once if it benefits the doer in the slightest degree," said Genestas. "If he tells the story of it, the toll brought in to his vanity is a sufficient substitute for gratitude. But if every doer of kindly actions always held his tongue about them, those who reaped the benefits would hardly say very much either. Now the people, according to your system, stand in need of examples, and how are they to hear of them amid this general reticence? Again, there is this poor pontooneer of ours, who saved the whole French army, and who was never able to tell his tale to any purpose; suppose that he had lost the use of his limbs, would the consciousness of what he had done have found him in bread? Answer me that, philosopher!"

"Perhaps the rules of morality cannot be absolute," Benassis answered; "though this is a dangerous idea, for it leaves the egotist free to settle cases of conscience in his own favor. Listen, captain; is not the man who never swerves from the principles of morality greater than he who transgresses them, even through necessity? Would not our veteran, dying of hunger, and unable to help himself, be worthy to rank with Homer? Human life is doubtless a final trial of

virtue as of genius, for both of which a better world is waiting. Virtue and genius seem to me to be the fairest forms of that complete and constant surrender of self that Jesus Christ came among men to teach. Genius sheds its light in the world and lives in poverty all its days, and virtue sacrifices itself in silence for the general good."

"I quite agree with you, sir," said Genestas; "but those who dwell on earth are men after all, and not angels; we are not perfect."

"That is quite true," Benassis answered. "And as for errors, I myself have abused the indulgence. But ought we not to aim, at any rate, at perfection? Is not virtue a fair ideal which the soul must always keep before it, a standard set up by heaven?"

"Amen," said the soldier. "An upright man is a magnificent thing, I grant you; but, on the other hand, you must admit that virtue is a divinity who may indulge in a scrap of gossip now and then in the strictest propriety."

The doctor smiled, but there was a melancholy bitterness in his tone as he said, "Ah! sir, you regard things with the lenience natural to those who live at peace with themselves; and I with all the severity of one who sees much that he would fain obliterate in the story of his life."

The two horsemen reached a cottage beside the bed of the torrent; the doctor dismounted and went into the house. Genestas, on the threshold, looked over the bright spring landscape that lay without, and then at the dark interior of the cottage, where a man was lying in bed. Benassis examined his patient, and suddenly exclaimed, "My good woman, it is no use my coming here unless you carry out my instructions! You have been giving him bread; you want to kill your husband, I suppose? Bothereation! If after this you give him anything besides tisane of couch-grass, I will never set foot in here again, and you can look where you like for another doctor."

"But, dear M. Benassis, my old man was starving, and when he had eaten nothing for a whole fortnight——"

"Oh, yes, yes. Now will you listen to me? If you let your husband eat a single mouthful of bread before I give him leave to take solid food, you will kill him, do you hear?"

"He shall not have anything, sir. Is he any better?" she asked, following the doctor to the door.

"Why, no. You have made him worse by feeding him. Shall I never get it into your stupid heads that you must not stuff people who are being dieted?"

"The peasants are incorrigible," Benassis went on, speaking to Genestas. "If a patient has eaten nothing for two or three days, they think he is at death's door, and they cram him with soup or wine or something. Here is a wretched woman for you that has all but killed her husband."

"Kill my husband with a little mite of a sop in wine!"

"Certainly, my good woman. It amazes me that he is still alive after that mess you cooked for him. Mind that you do exactly as I have told you."

"Yes, dear sir, I would far rather die myself than lose him."

"Oh! as to that I shall soon see. I shall come again to-morrow evening to bleed him."

"Let us walk along the side of the stream," Benassis said to Genestas; "there is only a footpath between this cottage and the next house where I must pay a call. That man's little boy will hold our horses."

"You must admire this lovely valley of ours a little," he went on; "it is like an English garden, is it not? The laborer who lives in the cottage which we are going to visit has never got over the death of one of his children. The eldest boy, he was only a lad, would try to do a man's work last harvest-tide; it was beyond his strength, and before the autumn was out he died of a decline. This is the first case of really strong fatherly love that has come under my notice. As a

rule, when their children die, the peasant's regret is for the loss of a useful chattel and a part of their stock-in-trade, and the older the child the heavier their sense of loss. A grown-up son or daughter is so much capital to the parents. But this poor fellow really loved that boy of his. 'Nothing can comfort me for my loss,' he said one day when I came across him out in the fields. He had forgotten all about his work, and was standing there motionless, leaning on his scythe; he had picked up his hone, it lay in his hand, and he had forgotten to use it. He has never spoken since of his grief to me, but he has grown sad and silent. Just now it is one of his little girls who is ill."

Benassis and his guest reached the little house as they talked. It stood beside a pathway that led to a bark-mill. They saw a man about forty years of age, standing under a willow tree, eating bread that had been rubbed with a clove of garlic.

"Well, Gasnier, is the little one doing better?" asked the doctor as he came up to him.

"I do not know, sir," he said dejectedly, "you will see; my wife is sitting with her. In spite of all your care, I am very much afraid that death will come to empty my home for me."

"Do not lose heart, Gasnier. Death is too busy to take up his abode in any dwelling."

Benassis went into the house, followed by the father. Half an hour later he came out again. The mother was with him this time, and he spoke to her, "You need have no anxiety about her now; follow out my instructions; she is out of danger."

"If you are growing tired of this sort of thing," the doctor said to the officer, as he mounted his horse, "I can put you on the way to the town, and you can return."

"No, I am not tired of it, I give you my word."

"But you will only see cottages everywhere, and they are

all alike ; nothing, to outward seeming, is more monotonous than the country."

"Let us go on," said the officer, as he rode up to the doctor's side.

They rode on in this way for several hours, and after going from one side of the canton to the other they returned towards evening to the precincts of the town.

"I must just go over there," the doctor said to Genestas, as he pointed out a place where a cluster of elm trees grew. "Those trees may possibly be two hundred years old," he went on, "and that is where the woman lives, on whose account the lad came to fetch me last night at dinner, with a message that she had turned quite white."

"Was it anything serious?"

"No," said Benassis, "an effect of pregnancy. It is the last month with her, a time at which some women suffer from spasms. But by way of precaution, I must go in any case to make sure that there are no further alarming symptoms; I shall see her through her confinement myself. And, moreover, I should like to show you one of our new industries; there is a brickfield here. It is a good road; shall we gallop?"

"Will your animal keep up with mine?" asked Genestas. "Heigh! Neptune!" he called to his horse, and in a moment the officer had been carried far ahead, and was lost to sight in a cloud of dust, but in spite of the paces of his horse he still heard the doctor beside him. At a word from Benassis his own horse left the commandant so far behind that the latter only came up with him at the gate of the brickfield, where the doctor was quietly fastening the bridle to the gate-post.

"The devil take it!" cried Genestas, after a look at the horse, that was neither sweated nor blown. "What kind of animal have you there?"

"Ah!" said the doctor, "you took him for a screw! The

history of this fine fellow would take up too much time just now; let it suffice to say that Roustan is a thoroughbred barb from the Atlas mountains, and a Barbary horse is as good as an Arab. This one of mine will gallop up the mountain roads without turning a hair, and will never miss his footing in a canter along the brink of a precipice. He was a present to me, and I think that I deserved it, for in this way a father sought to repay me for his daughter's life. She is one of the wealthiest heiresses in Europe, and she was at the brink of death when I found her on the road to Savoy. If I were to tell you how I cured that young lady, you would take me for a quack. Aha! that is the sound of the bells on the horses and the rumbling of a wagon; it is coming along this way; let us see, perhaps that is Vigneau himself; and if so, take a good look at him!"

In another moment the officer saw a team of four huge horses, like those which are owned by prosperous farmers in Brie. The harness, the little bells, and the knots of braid in their manes were clean and smart. The great wagon itself was painted bright blue, and perched aloft in it sat a stalwart, sunburned youth, who shouldered his whip like a gun and whistled a tune.

"No," said Benassis, "that is only the teamster. But see how the master's prosperity in business is reflected by all his belongings, even by the carter's wagon! Is it not a sign of a capacity for business not very often met with in remote country places?"

"Yes, yes, it all looks very smart indeed," the officer answered.

"Well, Vigneau has two more wagons and teams like that one, and he has a small pony besides for business purposes, for he does a trade over a wide area. And only four years ago he had nothing in the world! Stay, that is a mistake—he had some debts. But let us go in."

"Is Mme. Vigneau in the house?" Benassis asked of the young teamster.

"She is out in the garden, sir ; I saw her just now by the hedge down yonder ; I will go and tell her that you are here."

Genestas followed Benassis across a wide open space with a hedge about it. In one corner various heaps of clay had been piled up, destined for tiles and pantiles, and a stack of brush-wood and logs (fuel for the kiln no doubt) lay in another part of the enclosure. Farther away some workmen were pounding chalk-stones and tempering the clay in a space enclosed by hurdles. The tiles, both round and square, were made under the great elms opposite the gateway, in a vast green arbor bounded by the roofs of the drying-shed, and near this last the yawning mouth of the kiln was visible. Some long-handled shovels lay about the worn cinder path. A second row of buildings had been erected parallel with these. There was a sufficiently wretched dwelling which housed the family, and some outbuildings—sheds and stables and a barn. The cleanliness that predominated throughout, and the thorough repair in which everything was kept, spoke well for the vigilance of the master's eyes. Some poultry and pigs wandered at large over the field.

"Vigneau's predecessor," said Benassis, "was a good-for-nothing, a lazy rascal who cared about nothing but drink. He had been a workman himself ; he could keep a fire in his kiln and could put a price on his work, and that was about all he knew ; he had no energy, and no idea of business. If no one came to buy his wares of him, they simply stayed on hand and were spoiled, and so he lost the value of them. So he died of want at last. He had ill-treated his wife till she was almost idiotic, and she lived in a state of abject wretchedness. It was so painful to see this laziness and incurable stupidity, and I so much disliked the sight of the tile-works, that I never came this way if I could help it. Luckily, both the man and his wife were old people. One fine day the tile-maker had a paralytic stroke, and I had him removed to the hospital at Grenoble at once. The owner of the tile-works agreed to

take it over without disputing about its condition, and I looked round for new tenants who would take their part in improving the industries of the canton.

"Mme. Gravier's waiting-maid had married a poor workman, who was earning so little with the potter who employed him that he could not support his household. He listened to my advice, and actually had sufficient courage to take a lease of our tile-works, when he had not so much as a penny. He came and took up his abode here, taught his wife, her aged mother, and his own mother how to make tiles, and made workmen of them. How they managed, I do not know, upon my honor ! Vigneau probably borrowed fuel to heat his kiln, he certainly worked by day, and fetched in his materials in basket-loads by night; in short, no one knew what boundless energy he brought to bear upon his enterprise; and the two old mothers, clad in rags, worked like negroes. In this way Vigneau contrived to fire several batches, and lived for the first year on bread that was hardly won by the toil of his household.

"Still, he made a living. His courage, patience, and sterling worth interested many people in him, and he began to be known. He was indefatigable. He would hurry over to Grenoble in the morning, and sell his bricks and tiles there; then he would return home about the middle of the day, and go back again to the town at night. He seemed to be in several places at once. Towards the end of the first year he took two little lads to help him. Seeing how things were, I loaned him some money, and since then from year to year the fortunes of the family have steadily improved. After the second year was over the two old mothers no longer moulded bricks nor pounded stones; they looked after the little gardens, made the soup, mended the clothes, they did spinning in the evenings, and gathered firewood in the daytime; while the young wife, who can read and write, kept the accounts. Vigneau had a small horse, and rode on his business errands about the neigh-



borhood ; next he thoroughly studied the art of brick and tile making, discovered how to make excellent square white paving-tiles, and sold them for less than the usual prices. In the third year he had a cart and a pair of horses, and at the same time his wife's appearance became almost elegant. Everything about his household improved with the improvement in his business, and everywhere there were the same neatness, method, and thrift that had been the making of his little fortune.

“ At last he had work enough for six men, to whom he pays good wages ; he employs a teamster, and everything about him wears an air of prosperity. Little by little, in short, by dint of taking pains and extending his business, his income has increased. He bought the tile-works last year, and next year he will rebuild his house. To-day all the worthy folk there are well clothed and in good health. His wife, who used to be so thin and pale when the burden of her husband's cares and anxieties used to press so hardly upon her, has recovered her good looks and has grown quite young and pretty again. The two old mothers are thoroughly happy, and take the deepest interest in every detail of the housekeeping or of the business. Work has brought money, and the money that brought freedom from care brought health and plenty and happiness. The story of this household is a living history in miniature of the commune since I have known it, and of all young industrial states. The tile factory that used to look so empty, melancholy, ill-kept, and useless, is now in full work, astir with life, and well stocked with everything required. There is a good stock of wood here, and all the raw material for the season's work : for, as you know, tiles can only be made during a few months in the year, between June and September. Is it not a pleasure to see all this activity ? My tile-maker has done his share of the work in every building in the place. He is always wide awake, always coming and going, always busy—‘ the devourer,’ they call him in these parts.”

Benassis had scarcely finished speaking when the wicket gate which gave entrance to the garden opened, and a nicely-dressed young woman appeared. She came forward as quickly as her condition allowed, though the two horsemen hastened towards her. Her attire somewhat recalled her former quality of ladies' maid, for she wore a pretty cap, a pink dress, a silk apron, and white stockings. Mme. Vigneau, in short, was a nice-looking woman, sufficiently plump, and if she was somewhat sunburned, her natural complexion must have been very fair. There were a few lines still left in her forehead, traced there by the troubles of past days, but she had a bright and winsome face. She spoke in a persuasive voice, as she saw that the doctor came no farther, "Will you not do me the honor of coming inside and resting for a moment, M. Benassis?"

"Certainly we will. Come this way, captain."

"The gentlemen must be very hot! Will you take a little milk or some wine? M. Benassis, please try a little of the wine that my husband has been so kind as to buy for my confinement. You will tell me if it is good."

"You have a good man for your husband."

"Yes, sir," she turned and spoke in quiet tones, "I am very well off."

"We will not take anything, Mme. Vigneau; I only came round this way to see that nothing troublesome had happened."

"Nothing," she said. "I was busy out in the garden, as you saw, turning the soil over for the sake of something to do."

Then the two old mothers came out to speak to Benassis, and the young teamster planted himself in the middle of the yard, in a spot whence he could have a good view of the doctor.

"Let us see, let me have your hand," said Benassis, addressing Mme. Vigneau; and as he carefully felt her pulse, he stood in silence, absorbed in thought. The three women,

meanwhile, scrutinized the commandant with the undisguised curiosity that country people do not scruple to express.

"Nothing could be better!" cried the doctor cheerily.

"Will she be confined soon?" both the mothers asked together.

"This week beyond a doubt. Is Vigneau away from home?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes, sir," the young wife answered; "he is hurrying about settling his business affairs, so as to be able to stay at home during my confinement, the dear man!"

"Well, my children, go on and prosper; continue to increase your wealth and to add to your family."

The cleanliness of the almost ruinous dwelling filled Genestas with admiration.

Benassis saw the officer's astonishment, and said, "There is no one like Mme. Vigneau for keeping a house clean and tidy like this. I wish that several people in the town would come here to take a lesson."

The tile-maker's wife blushed and turned her head away; but the faces of the two old mothers beamed with pleasure at the doctor's words, and the three women walked with them to the spot where the horses were waiting.

"Well, now," the doctor said to the two old women, "here is happiness for you both! Were you not longing to be grandmothers?"

"Oh, do not talk about it," said the young wife; "they will drive me crazy among them. My two mothers wish for a boy, and my husband would like to have a little girl. It will be very difficult to please them all, I think."

"But you yourself," asked Benassis; "what is your wish?"

"Ah, sir, I wish for a child of my own."

"There! She is a mother already, you see," said the doctor to the officer, as he laid his hand on the bridle of his horse.

"Good-bye, M. Benassis; my husband will be sadly dis-

appointed to learn that you have been here when he was not at home to see you."

"He has not forgotten to send the thousand tiles to the Grange-aux-Belles for me?"

"You know quite well, sir, that he would keep all the orders in the canton waiting to serve you. Why, taking your money is the thing that troubles him most; but I always tell him that your crowns bring luck with them, and so they do."

"Good-bye," said Benassis.

A little group gathered about the bars across the entrance to the tile-works. The three women, the young teamster, and two workmen who had left off work to greet the doctor lingered there to have the pleasure of being with him until the last moment, as we are wont to linger with those we love. The promptings of men's hearts must everywhere be the same, and in every land friendship expresses itself in the same gracious ways.

Benassis looked at the height of the sun and spoke to his companion—

"There are still two hours of daylight left; and if you are not too hungry, we will go to see some one with whom I nearly always spend the interval between the last of my visits and the hour for dinner. She is a charming girl whom every one here calls my 'good friend.' That is the name that they usually give to an affianced bride; but you must not imagine that there is the slightest imputation of any kind implied or intended by the use of the word in this case. Poor child, the care that I have taken of her has, as may be imagined, made her an object of jealousy, but the general opinion entertained as to my character has prevented any spiteful gossip. If no one understands the apparent caprice that has led me to make an allowance to La Fosseuse, so that she can live without being compelled to work, nobody has any doubts as to her character. I have watched over her with friendly care, and every one knows that I should never hesitate to marry her if

my affection for her exceeded the limits of friendship. But no woman exists for me here in the canton or anywhere else," said the doctor, forcing a smile. "Some natures feel a tyrannous need to attach themselves to some one thing or being which they single out from among the beings and things around them; this need is felt most keenly by a man of quick sympathies, and all the more pressingly if his life has been made desolate. So, trust me, it is a favorable sign if a man is strongly attached to his dog or his horse! Among the suffering flock which chance has given into my care, this poor little sufferer has come to be for me like the pet lamb that the shepherd lasses deck with ribbons in my own sunny land of Languedoc; they talk to it and allow it to find pasture by the side of the cornfields, and its leisurely pace is never hurried by the shepherd's dog."

Benassis stood with his hand on his horse's mane as he spoke, ready to spring into the saddle, but making no effort to do so, as though the thoughts that stirred in him were but little in keeping with rapid movements.

"Let us go," he said at last; "come with me and pay her a visit. I am taking you to see her; does not that tell you that I treat her as a sister?"

As they rode on their way again, Genestas said to the doctor, "Will you regard it as inquisitiveness on my part if I ask to hear more of La Fosseuse? I have come to know the story of many lives through you, and hers cannot be less interesting than some of these."

Benassis stopped his horse as he answered. "Perhaps you will not share in the feelings of interest awakened in me by La Fosseuse. Her fate is like my own; we have both alike missed our vocation; it is the similarity of our lots that occasions my sympathy for her and the feelings that I experience at the sight of her. You either followed your natural bent when you entered upon a military career, or you took a liking for your calling after you had adopted it, otherwise you

would not have borne the heavy yoke of military discipline till now ; you, therefore, cannot understand the sorrows of a soul that must always feel renewed within it the stir of longings that can never be realized ; nor the pining existence of a creature forced to live in an alien sphere. Such sufferings as these are known only to these natures and to God who sends their afflictions, for they alone can know how deeply the events of life affect them. You yourself have seen the miseries produced by long wars till they have almost ceased to impress you, but have you never detected a trace of sadness in your mind at the sight of a tree bearing sere leaves in the midst of spring, some tree that is pining and dying because it has been planted in soil in which it could not find the sustenance required for its full development ? Ever since my twentieth year there has been something painful and melancholy for me about the drooping of a stunted plant, and now I cannot bear the sight and turn my head away. My youthful sorrow was a vague presentiment of the sorrows of my later life ; it was a kind of sympathy between my present and a future dimly foreshadowed by the life of the tree that before its time was going the way of all trees and men."

"I thought that you had suffered when I saw how kind you were."

"You see, sir," the doctor went on without any reply to the remark made by Genestas, "that to speak of *La Fosseuse* is to speak of myself. *La Fosseuse* is a plant in an alien soil ; a human plant, moreover, consumed by sad thoughts that have their source in the depths of her nature, and that never cease to multiply. The poor girl is never well and strong. The soul within her kills the body. This fragile creature was suffering from the sorest of all troubles, a trouble which receives the least possible sympathy from our selfish world, and how could I look on with indifferent eyes ? for I, a man, strong to wrestle with pain, was nightly tempted to refuse to bear the burden of a sorrow like hers. Perhaps I might actually have

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refused to bear it but for a thought of religion which soothes my impatience and fills my heart with sweet illusions. Even if we were not children of the same Father in heaven, La Fosseuse would still be my sister in suffering ! ”

Benassis pressed his knees against his horse's sides, and swept ahead of Commandant Genestas, as if he shrank from continuing this conversation any further. When their horses were once more cantering abreast of each other, he spoke again : “ Nature has created this poor girl for sorrow,” he said, “ as she has created other women for joy. It is impossible to do otherwise than believe in a future life at the sight of natures thus predestined to suffer. La Fosseuse is sensitive and highly strung. If the weather is dark and cloudy, she is depressed ; she ‘ weeps when the sky is weeping,’ a phrase of her own ; she sings with the birds ; she grows happy and serene under a cloudless sky ; the loveliness of a bright day passes into her face ;, a soft sweet perfume is an inexhaustible pleasure to her ; I have seen her take delight the whole day long in the scent breathed forth by some mignonette ; and, after one of those rainy mornings that bring out all the soul of the flowers and give indescribable freshness and brightness to the day, she seems to overflow with gladness like the green world around her. If it is close and hot, and there is thunder in the air, La Fosseuse feels a vague trouble that nothing can soothe. She lies on her bed, complains of numberless different ills, and does not know what ails her. In answer to my questions, she tells me that her bones are melting, that she is dissolving into water ; her ‘ heart has left her,’ to quote another of her sayings.

“ I have sometimes come upon the poor child suddenly and found her in tears, as she gazed at the sunset effects we sometimes see here among our mountains, when bright masses of cloud gather and crowd together and pile themselves above the golden peaks of the hills. ‘ Why are you crying, little one ? ’ I have asked her. ‘ I do not know, sir,’ has been the

answer; 'I have grown so stupid with looking up there; I have looked and looked, till I hardly know where I am.' 'But what do you see there?' 'I cannot tell you, sir,' and you might question her in his way all the evening, yet you would never draw a word from her; but she would look at you, and every glance would seem full of thoughts, or she would sit with tears in her eyes, scarcely saying a word, apparently rapt in musing. Those musings of hers are so profound that you fall under the spell of them; on me, at least, she has the effect of a cloud overcharged with electricity. One day I plied her with questions; I tried with all my might to make her talk; at last I let fall a few rather hasty words; and well—she burst into tears.

"At other times La Fosseuse is bright and winning, active, merry, and sprightly; she enjoys talking, and the ideas which she expresses are fresh and original. She is, however, quite unable to apply herself steadily to any kind of work. When she was out in the fields she used to spend whole hours in looking at a flower, in watching the water flow, in gazing at the wonders in the depths of the clear, still river pools, at the picturesque mosaic made up of pebbles and earth and sand, of water plants and green moss, and the brown soil washed down by the stream, a deposit full of soft shades of color, and of hues that contrast strangely with each other.

"When I first came to the district the poor girl was starving. It hurt her pride to accept the bread of others; and it was only when driven to the last extremity of want and suffering that she could bring herself to ask for charity. The feeling that this was a disgrace would often give her energy, and for several days she worked in the fields; but her strength was soon exhausted, and illness obliged her to leave the work that she had begun. She had scarcely recovered when she went to a farm on the outskirts of the town and asked to be taken on to look after the cattle; she did her work well and intelligently, but after a while she left without giving any



reason for so doing. The constant toil, day after day, was no doubt too heavy a yoke for one who is all independence and caprice. Then she set herself to look for mushrooms or for truffles, going over to Grenoble to sell them. But the gaudy trifles in the town were very tempting, the few small coins in her hand seemed to be great riches; she would forget her poverty and buy ribbons and finery, without a thought for to-morrow's bread. But if some other girl here in the town took a fancy to her brass crucifix, her agate heart, or her velvet ribbon, she would make them over to her at once, glad to give happiness, for she lives by generous impulses. So La Fosseuse was loved and pitied and despised by turns. Everything in her nature was a cause of suffering to her—her indolence, her kindness of heart, her coquetry; for she is coquettish, dainty, and inquisitive; in short, she is a woman; she is as simple as a child, and, like a child, she is carried away by her tastes and her impressions. If you tell her about some noble deed, she trembles, her color rises, her heart throbs fast, and she sheds tears of joy; if you begin a story about robbers, she turns pale with terror. You could not find a more sincere, open-hearted, and scrupulously loyal nature anywhere; if you were to give a hundred gold-pieces into her keeping, she would bury them in some out-of-the-way nook and beg her bread as before."

There was a change in Benassis' tone as he uttered these last words.

"I once determined to put her to the proof," he said, "and I repented of it. It is like espionage to bring a test to bear upon another, is it not? It means that we suspect them at any rate."

Here the doctor paused, as though some inward reflection engrossed him; he was quite unconscious of the embarrassment that his last remark had caused to his companion, who busied himself with disentangling the reins in order to hide his confusion. Benassis soon resumed his talk.

"I should like to find a husband for my Fosseuse. I should be glad to make over one of my farms to some good fellow who would make her happy. And she would be happy. The poor girl would love her children to distraction ; for motherhood, which develops the whole of a woman's nature, would give full scope to her overflowing sentiments. She has never cared for any one, however. Yet her impressionable nature is a danger to her. She knows this herself, and when she saw that I recognized it, she admitted the excitability of her temperament to me. She belongs to the small minority of women whom the slightest contact with others causes to vibrate perilously ; so that she must be made to value herself on her discretion and her womanly pride. She is as wild and shy as a swallow ! Ah ! what a wealth of kindness there is in her ! Nature meant her to be a rich woman ; she would be so beneficent : for a well-loved woman ; she would be so faithful and true. She is only twenty-two years old, and is sinking already beneath the weight of her soul ; a victim to highly-strung nerves, to an organization either too delicate or too full of power. A passionate love for a faithless lover would drive her mad, my poor Fosseuse ! I have made a study of her temperament, recognized the reality of her prolonged nervous attacks, and of the swift mysterious recurrence of her uplifted moods. I found that they were immediately dependent on atmospheric changes and on the variations of the moon, a fact which I have carefully verified ; and since then I have cared for her, as a creature unlike all others, for she is a being whose ailing existence I alone can understand. As I have told you, she is the pet lamb. But you shall see her ; this is her cottage."

They had come about one-third of the way up the mountain side. Low bushes grew on either hand along the steep paths which they were ascending at a foot pace. At last, at a turn in one of the paths, Genestas saw La Fosseuse's dwelling, which stood on one of the largest knolls on the mountain.

Around it was a green sloping space of lawn about three acres in extent, planted with trees, and surrounded by a wall high enough to serve as a fence, but not so high as to shut out the view of the landscape. Several rivulets that had their source in this garden formed little cascades among the trees. The brick-built cottage with a low roof that projected several feet was a charming detail in the landscape. It consisted of a ground floor and a single story, and stood facing the south. All the windows were in the front of the house, for its small size and lack of depth from back to front made other openings unnecessary. The doors and shutters were painted green, and the underside of the penthouses had been lined with deal boards in the German fashion, and painted white. The rustic charm of the whole little dwelling lay in its spotless cleanliness.

Climbing plants and briar roses grew about the house; a great walnut tree had been allowed to remain among the flowering acacias and trees that bore sweet-scented blossoms, and a few weeping willows had been set by the little streams in the garden space. A thick belt of pines and beeches grew behind the house, so that the picturesque little dwelling was brought out into strong relief by the sombre width of background. At that hour of the day, the air was fragrant with the scents from the hillsides and the perfume from La Fosseuse's garden. The sky overhead was clear and serene, but low clouds hung on the horizon, and the far-off peaks had begun to take the deep rose hues that the sunset often brings. At the height which they had reached the whole valley lay before their eyes, from distant Grenoble to the little lake at the foot of the circle of crags by which Genestas had passed on the previous day. Some little distance above the house a line of poplars on the hill indicated the highway that led to Grenoble. Rays of sunlight fell slantwise across the little town which glittered like a diamond, for the soft red light which poured over it like a flood was reflected by all its window-panes. Genestas reined in his horse at the sight, and pointed to the

dwellings in the valley, to the new town, and to La Fosseuse's house.

"Since the victory of Wagram, and Napoleon's return to the Tuileries in 1815," he said, with a sigh, "nothing has so stirred me as the sight of all this. I owe this pleasure to you, sir, for you have taught me to see beauty in a landscape."

"Yes," said the doctor, smiling as he spoke, "it is better to build towns than to storm them."

"Oh! sir, how about the taking of Moscow and the surrender of Mantua! Why, you do not really know what that means! Is it not a glory for all of us? You are a good man, but Napoleon also was a good man. If it had not been for England, you both would have understood each other, and our Emperor would never have fallen. There are no spies here," said the officer, looking around him, "and I can say openly that I love him, now that he is dead! What a ruler! He knew every man when he saw him! He would have made you a Councilor of State, for he was a great administrator himself; even to the point of knowing how many cartridges were left in the men's boxes after an action. Poor man! While you were talking about La Fosseuse, I thought of him, and how he was lying dead in St. Helena! Was that the kind of climate and country to suit *him*, whose seat had been a throne, and who had lived with his feet in the stirrups? They say that he used to work in the garden. The deuce! He was not made to plant cabbages.—And now we must serve the Bourbons, and loyally, sir; for, after all, France is France, as you were saying yesterday."

Genestas dismounted as he uttered these last words, and mechanically followed the example set by Benassis, who fastened his horse's bridle to a tree.

"Can she be away?" said the doctor, when he did not see La Fosseuse on the threshold. They went into the house, but there was no one in the sitting-room on the ground floor.

"She must have heard the sound of a second horse," said

Benassis, with a smile, "and has gone upstairs to put on her cap, or her sash, or some piece of finery."

He left Genestas alone, and went upstairs in search of La Fosseuse. The commandant made a survey of the room. He noticed the pattern of the paper that covered the walls—roses scattered over a gray background, and the straw matting that did duty for a carpet on the floor. The armchair, the table, and the smaller chairs were made of wood from which the bark had not been removed. The room was not without ornament; some flower-stands, as they might be called, made of osiers and wooden hoops, had been filled with moss and flowers, and the windows were draped by white dimity curtains bordered with a scarlet fringe. There was a mirror above the chimney-piece, where a plain china jar stood between two candlesticks. Some calico lay on the table; shirts, apparently, had been cut out and begun, several pairs of gussets were finished, and a work-basket, scissors, needles, and thread, and all a needle-woman's requirements lay beside them. Everything was as fresh and clean as a shell that the sea has tossed up on the beach. Genestas saw that a kitchen lay on the other side of the passage, and that the staircase was at the farther end of it. The upper story, like the ground floor, evidently consisted of two rooms only. "Come, do not be frightened," Benassis was saying to La Fosseuse; "come downstairs!"

Genestas promptly retreated into the sitting-room when he heard these words, and in another moment a slender girl, well and gracefully made, appeared in the doorway. She wore a gown of cambric, covered with narrow pink stripes, and cut low at the throat, so as to display a muslin chemisette. Shyness and timidity had brought the color to a face which had nothing very remarkable about it save a certain flatness of feature which called to mind the Cossack and Russian countenances that since the disasters of 1814 have unfortunately come to be so widely known in France. La Fosseuse was, in fact, very

like these men of the North. Her nose turned up at the end, and was sunk in her face, her mouth was wide and her chin small, her hands and arms were red and, like her feet, were of the peasant type, large and strong. Although she had been used to an outdoor life, to exposure to the sun and the scorching summer winds, her complexion had the bleached look of withered grass; but after the first glance this made her face more interesting, and there was such a sweet expression in her blue eyes, so much grace about her movements, and such music in her voice, that little as her features seemed to harmonize with the disposition which Benassis had praised to the commandant, the officer recognized in her the capricious and ailing creature, condemned to suffering by a nature that had been thwarted in its growth.

La Fosseuse deftly stirred the fire of dry branches and turfs of peat, then sat down in an armchair and took up one of the shirts that she had begun. She sat there under the officer's eyes, half bashful, afraid to look up, and calm to all appearance; but her bodice rose and fell with the rapid breathing that betrayed her nervousness, and it struck Genestas that her figure was very graceful.

"Well, my poor child, is your work going on nicely?" said Benassis, taking up the material intended for the shirts, and passing it through his fingers.

La Fosseuse gave the doctor a timid and beseeching glance, at the same time ceasing to ply her needle.

"Do not scold me, sir," she entreated; "I have not touched them to-day, although they were ordered by you, and for people who need them very badly. But the weather has been so fine! I wandered out and picked a quantity of mushrooms and white truffles, and took them over to Jacquotte; she was very much pleased, for some people are coming to dinner. I was so glad that I thought of it; something seemed to tell me to go to look for them."

She began to ply her needle again.

"You have a very pretty house here, mademoiselle," said Genestas, addressing her.

"It is not mine at all, sir," she said, looking at the stranger, and her eyes seemed to grow red and tearful; "it belongs to M. Benassis," and she turned towards the doctor with a gentle expression on her face.

"You know quite well, my child, that you will never have to leave it," he said, as he took her hand in his.

La Fosseuse suddenly rose and left the room.

"Well," said the doctor, addressing the officer, "what do you think of her?"

"There is something strangely touching about her," Genestas answered. "How very nicely you have fitted up this little nest of hers!"

"Bah! a wall-paper at fifteen or twenty *sous*; it was carefully chosen, but that was all. The furniture is nothing very much either, my basket-maker made it for me; he wanted to show his gratitude; and La Fosseuse made the curtains herself out of a few yards of calico. This little house of hers and her simple furniture seem pretty to you, because you come upon them up here on a hillside in a forlorn part of the world where you did not expect to find things clean and tidy. The reason of the prettiness is a kind of harmony between the little house and its surroundings. Nature has set picturesque groups of trees and running streams about it, and has scattered her fairest flowers among the grass, her sweet-scented wild strawberry blossoms, and her lovely violets—Well, what is the matter?" asked Benassis, as La Fosseuse came back to them.

"Oh! nothing, nothing," she answered. "I fancied that one of my chickens was missing, and had not been shut up."

Her remark was disingenuous, but this was only noticed by the doctor, who said in her ear, "You have been crying!"

"Why do you say things like that to me before some one else?" she asked in reply.

"Mademoiselle," said Genestas, "it is a great pity that you live here all by yourself; you ought to have a mate in such a charming cage as this."

"That is true," she said, "but what would you have? I am poor, and I am hard to please. I feel that it would not suit me at all to carry the soup out into the fields, nor to push a hand-cart; to feel the misery of those whom I should love, and have no power to put an end to it; to carry my children in my arms all day, and patch and repatch a man's rags. The curé tells me that such thoughts as these are not very Christian; I know that myself, but how can I help it? There are days when I would rather eat a morsel of dry bread than cook anything for my dinner. Why would you have me worry some man's life out with my failings? He would perhaps work himself to death to satisfy my whims, and that would not be right. Pshaw! an unluckily lot has fallen to me, and I ought to bear it by myself."

"And besides, she is a born do-nothing," said Benassis. "We must take my poor Fosseuse as we find her. But all that she has been saying to you simply means that she has never loved as yet," he added, smiling. Then he rose and went out on to the lawn for a moment.

"You must be very fond of M. Benassis?" asked Genestas.

"Oh! yes, sir; and there are plenty of people hereabouts who feel as I do—that they would be glad to do anything in the world for him. And yet he who cures other people has some trouble of his own that nothing can cure. You are his friend, perhaps you know what it is? Who could have given pain to such a man, who is the very image of God on earth? I know a great many here who think that the corn grows faster if he has passed by their field in the morning," she remarked to Genestas.

"And what do you think yourself?"

"I, sir? When I have seen him," she seemed to hesitate, then she went on, "I am happy all the rest of the day."



She bent her head over her work, and plied her needle with unwonied swiftness.

"Well, has the captain been telling you something about Napoleon?" said the doctor, as he came in again.

"Have you seen the Emperor, sir?" cried La Fosseuse, gazing at the officer's face with eager curiosity.

"Good gracious!" said Genestas, "hundreds of times!"

"Oh! how I should like to know something about the army!"

"Perhaps we will come to take a cup of coffee with you to-morrow, and you shall hear something about the army, dear child," said Benassis, who laid his hand on her shoulder and kissed her brow. "She is my daughter, you see!" he added, turning to the commandant; "there is something wanting in the day, somehow, when I have not kissed her forehead."

La Fosseuse held Benassis' hand in a tight clasp as she murmured, "Oh! you are very kind!"

They left the house; but she came after them to see them mount. She waited till Genestas was in the saddle, and then whispered in Benassis' ear, "Tell me who that gentleman is?"

"Aha!" said the doctor, putting a foot in the stirrup, "a husband for you, perhaps."

She stood on the spot where they left her, absorbed in watching their progress down the steep path; and when they came past the end of the garden they saw her already perched on a little heap of stones, so that she might still keep them in view and give them a last nod of farewell.

"There is something very unusual about that girl, sir," Genestas said to the doctor when they had left the house far behind.

"There is, is there not?" he answered. "Many a time I have said to myself that she will make a charming wife, but I can only love her as a sister or a daughter, and in no other way; my heart is dead."

"Has she any relations?" asked Genestas. "What did her father and mother do?"

"Oh, it is quite a long story," answered Benassis. "Neither her father nor mother nor any of her relations are living. Everything about her down to her name interested me. La Fosseuse was born here in the town. Her father, a laborer from Saint Laurent du Pont, was nicknamed *Le Fosseur*, which is no doubt a contraction of *fossoyeur*, for the office of sexton had been in his family time out of mind. All the sad associations of the graveyard hang about the name. Here, as in some other parts of France, there is an old custom, dating from the times of the Latin civilization, in virtue of which a woman takes her husband's name, with the addition of a feminine termination, and this girl has been called La Fosseuse, after her father.

"The laborer had married the waiting-woman of some countess or other who owns an estate at a distance of a few leagues. It was a love-match. Here, as in all country districts, love is a very small element in a marriage. The peasant, as a rule, wants a wife who will bear him children, a housewife who will make good soup and take it out to him in the fields, who will spin and make his shirts and mend his clothes. Such a thing had not happened for a long while in a district where a young man not unfrequently leaves his betrothed for another girl who is richer by three or four acres of land. The fate of Le Fosseur and his wife was scarcely happy enough to induce our Dauphinois to forsake their calculating habits and practical way of regarding things. La Fosseuse, who was a very pretty woman, died when her daughter was born, and her husband's grief for his loss was so great that he followed her within the year, leaving nothing in the world to his little one except an existence whose continuance was very doubtful—a mere feeble flicker of a life. A charitable neighbor took the care of the baby upon herself, and brought her up till she was nine years old. Then the burden of supporting La Fos-

seuse became too heavy for the good woman ; so at the time of year when travelers are passing along the roads, she sent her charge to beg for her living upon the highways.

“ One day the little orphan asked for bread at the countess’ château, and they kept the child for her mother’s sake. She was to be waiting-maid some day to the daughter of the house, and was brought up to this end. Her young mistress was married five years later ; but meanwhile the poor little thing was the victim of all the caprices of wealthy people, whose beneficence for the most part is not to be depended upon even while it lasts. They are generous by fits and starts ; sometimes patrons, sometimes friends, sometimes masters, in this way they falsify the already false position of the poor children in whom they interest themselves, and trifle with the hearts, the lives, and futures of their protégées, whom they regard very lightly. From the first La Fosseuse became almost a companion to the young heiress ; she was taught to read and write, and her future mistress sometimes amused herself by giving her music lessons. She was treated sometimes as a lady’s companion, sometimes as a waiting-maid, and in this way they made an incomplete being of her. She acquired a taste for luxury and for dress, together with manners ill-suited to her real position. She has been roughly schooled by misfortune since then, but the vague feeling that she is destined for a higher lot has not been effaced in her.

“ A day came at last, however, a fateful day for the poor girl, when the young countess (who was married by this time) discovered La Fosseuse arrayed in one of her ball dresses, and dancing before a mirror. La Fosseuse was no longer anything but a waiting-maid, and the orphan girl, then sixteen years of age, was dismissed without pity. Her idle ways plunged her once more into poverty ; she wandered about begging by the roadside, and working at times as I have told you. Sometimes she thought of drowning herself, sometimes also of giving herself to the first comer ; she spent most of her time think-

ing dark thoughts, lying by the side of a wall in the sun, with her face buried in the grass, and passers-by would sometimes throw a few halfpence to her, simply because she asked them for nothing. One whole year she spent in a hospital at Annecy after heavy toil in the harvest-field; she had only undertaken the work in the hope that it would kill her, and that so she might die. You should hear her when she speaks of her feelings and ideas during this time of her life; her simple confidences are often very curious.

"She came back to the little town at last, just about the time when I decided to take up my abode in it. I wanted to understand the minds of the people beneath my rule; her character struck me, and I made a study of it; then when I became aware of her physical infirmities, I determined to watch over her. Perhaps in time she may grow accustomed to work with her needle, but, whatever happens, I have secured her future."

"She is quite alone up there!" said Genestas.

"No. One of my herdswomen sleeps in the house," the doctor answered. "You did not see my farm buildings which lie behind the house. They are hidden by the pine-trees. Oh! she is quite safe. Moreover, there are no rough fellows here in the valley; if any come among us by any chance, I send them into the army, where they make excellent soldiers."

"Poor girl!" said Genestas.

"Oh! the folk round about do not pity her at all," said Benassis; "on the other hand, they think her very lucky; but there is this difference between her and the other women, God has given strength to them and weakness to her, and they do not see that."

The moment that the two horsemen came out upon the road to Grenoble, Benassis stopped with an air of satisfaction; a different view had suddenly opened out before them; he foresaw its effect upon Genestas, and wished to enjoy his surprise. As far as the eye could see, two green walls sixty

feet high rose above a road which was rounded like a garden path. The trees had not been cut or trimmed, each one preserved a magnificent palm-branch shape that makes the Lombard poplar one of the grandest of trees; there they stood a natural monument which a man might well be proud of having reared. The shadow had already reached one side of the road, transforming it into a vast wall of black leaves, but the setting sun shone full upon the other side, which stood out in contrast, for the young leaves at the tips of every branch had been dyed a bright golden hue, and, as the breeze stirred through the waving curtain, it gleamed in the light.

"You must be very happy here!" cried Genestas. "The sight of this must be all pleasure to you."

"The love of nature is the only love that does not deceive human hopes. There is no disappointment here," said the doctor. "Those poplars are ten years old; have you ever seen any that are better grown than these of mine?"

"God is great!" said the soldier, coming to a stand in the middle of the road, of which he saw neither beginning nor end.

"You do me good," cried Benassis. "It was a pleasure to hear you say over again what I have so often said in the midst of this avenue. There is something holy about this place. Here, we are like two mere specks; and the feeling of our own littleness always brings us into the presence of God."

They rode on slowly and in silence, listening to their horses' hoof-beats; the sound echoed along the green corridor as it might have done beneath the vaulted roof of a cathedral.

"How many things have a power to stir us which town-dwellers do not suspect," said the doctor. "Do you notice the sweet scent given off by the gum of the poplar buds and the resin of the larches? How delightful it is!"

"Listen!" exclaimed Genestas. "Let us wait a moment." A distant sound of singing came to their ears.

"Is it a woman or a man, or is it a bird?" asked the commandant in a low voice. "Is it the voice of this wonderful landscape!"

"It is something of all these things," the doctor answered, as he dismounted and fastened his horse to a branch of a poplar tree.

He made a sign to the officer to follow his example and to come with him. They went slowly along a footpath between two hedges of blossoming hawthorn which filled the damp evening air with its delicate fragrance. The sun shone full into the pathway; the light and warmth were very perceptible after the shade thrown by the long wall of poplar trees; the still powerful rays poured a flood of red light over a cottage at the end of the stony track. The ridge of the cottage roof was usually a bright green with its overgrowth of mosses and house-leeks, and the thatch was brown as a chestnut shell, but just now it seemed to be powdered with a golden dust. The cottage itself was scarcely visible through the haze of light; the ruinous wall, the doorway and everything about it were radiant with a fleeting glory and a beauty due to chance, such as is sometimes seen for an instant in a human face, beneath the influence of a strong emotion that brings warmth and color into it. In a life under the open sky and among the fields, the transient and tender grace of such moments as these draws from us the wish of the apostle who said to Jesus Christ upon the mountain, "Let us build a tabernacle and dwell here."

The wide landscape seemed at that moment to have found a voice whose purity and sweetness equaled its own sweetness and purity, a voice as mournful as the dying light in the west—for a vague reminder of death is divinely set in the heavens, and the sun above gives the same warning that is given here on earth by the flowers and the bright insects of a day. There is a tinge of sadness about the radiance of sunset, and the melody was sad. It was a song widely known in days of yore,

a ballad of love and sorrow that once had served to stir the national hatred of France for England. Beaumarchais, in a later day, had given it back its true poetry by adapting it for the French theatre and putting it into the mouth of a page, who pours out his heart to his stepmother. Just now it was simply the air that rose and fell. There were no words; the plaintive voice of the singer touched and thrilled the soul.

"It is the swan's song," said Benassis. "That voice does not sound twice in a century for human ears. Let us hurry; we must put a stop to the singing! The child is killing himself; it would be cruel to listen to him any longer. Be quiet, Jacques! Come, come, be quiet!" cried the doctor.

The music ceased. Genestas stood motionless and overcome with astonishment. A cloud had drifted across the sun, the landscape and the voice were both mute. Shadow, chillness, and silence had taken the place of the soft glory of the light, the warm breath of the breeze, and the child's singing.

"What makes you disobey me?" asked Benassis. "I shall not bring you any more rice pudding nor snail broth! No more fresh dates and white bread for you! So you want to die and break your poor mother's heart, do you?"

Genestas came into a little yard, which was sufficiently clean and tidily kept, and saw before him a lad of fifteen, who looked as delicate as a woman. His hair was fair but scanty, and the color in his face was so bright that it seemed hardly natural. He rose up slowly from the bench where he was sitting, beneath a thick bush of jessamine and some blossoming lilacs that were running riot, so that he was almost hidden among the leaves.

"You know very well," said the doctor, "that I told you not to talk, not to expose yourself to the chilly evening air, and to go to bed as soon as the sun was set. What put it into your head to sing?"

"Well! M. Benassis, it was so very warm out here, and it is so nice to feel warm! I am always cold. I felt so happy

that without thinking I began to try over 'Malbrouk goes to the Wars,' just for fun, and then I began to listen to myself because my voice was something like the sound of the flute your shepherd plays."

"Well, my poor Jacques, this must not happen again; do you hear? Let me have your hand," and the doctor felt his pulse.

The boy's eyes had their usual sweet expression, but just now they shone with a feverish light.

"It is just as I thought, you are covered with perspiration," said Benassis. "Your mother has not come in yet?"

"No, sir."

"Come! go indoors and get into bed."

The young invalid went back into the cottage, followed by Benassis and the officer.

"Just light a candle, Captain Bluteau," said the doctor, who was helping Jacques to take off his rough, tattered clothing.

When Genestas had struck a light, and the interior of the room was visible, he was surprised by the extreme thinness of the child, who seemed to be little more than skin and bone. When the little peasant had been put to bed, Benassis tapped the lad's chest, and listened to the ominous sounds made in this way by his fingers; then, after some deliberation, he drew back the coverlet over Jacques, stepped back a few paces, folded his arms across his chest, and closely scrutinized his patient.

"How do you feel, my little man?"

"Quite comfortable, sir."

A table, with four spindle legs, stood in the room; the doctor drew it up to the bed, found a tumbler and a phial on the mantle-shelf, and composed a draught, by carefully measuring a few drops of brown liquid from the phial into some water, Genestas holding the light the while.

"Your mother is very late."



"She is coming, sir," said the child; "I can hear her footsteps on the path."

The doctor and the officer looked around them while they waited. At the foot of the bed there was a sort of mattress made of moss, on which, doubtless, the mother was wont to sleep in her clothes, for there were neither sheets nor coverlet. Genestas pointed out this bed to Benassis, who nodded slightly to show that he likewise had already admired this motherly devotion. There was a clatter of sabots in the yard, and the doctor went out.

"You will have to sit up with Jacques to-night, Mother Colas. If he tells you that his breathing is bad, you must let him drink some of the draught that I have poured into the tumbler on the table. Take care not to let him have more than two or three sips at a time; there ought to be enough in the tumbler to last him all through the night. Above all things, do not touch the phial, and change the child's clothing at once. He is perspiring heavily."

"I could not manage to wash his shirts to-day, sir; I had to take the hemp over to Grenoble, as we wanted the money."

"Very well, then, I will send you some shirts."

"Then is he worse, my poor lad?" asked the woman.

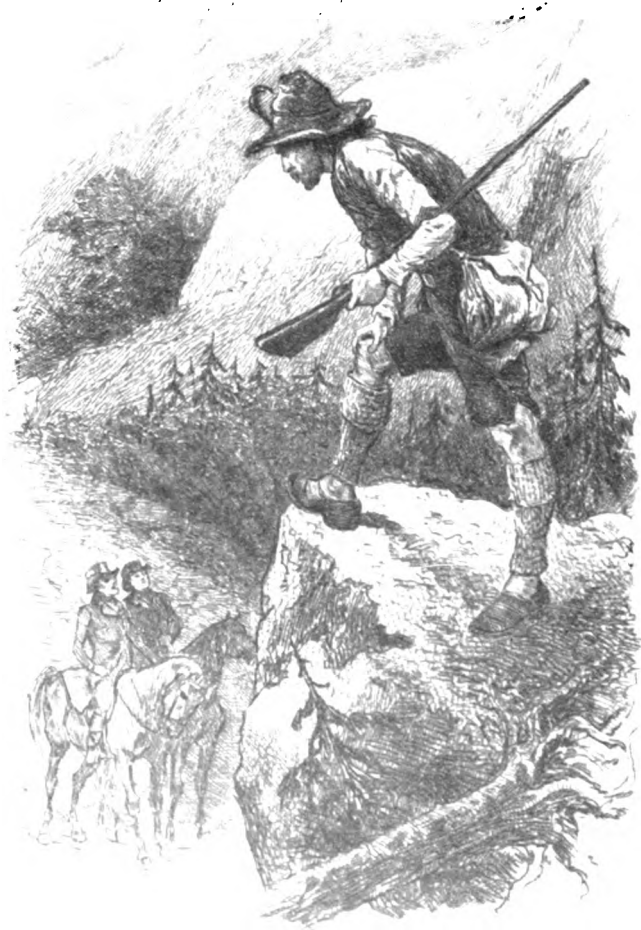
"He has been so imprudent as to sing, Mother Colas; and it is not to be expected that any good can come of it; but do not be hard upon him, nor scold him. Do not be down-hearted about it; and if Jacques complains overmuch, send a neighbor to fetch me. Good-bye."

The doctor called to his friend, and they went back along the footpath.

"Is that little peasant consumptive?" asked Genestas.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes," answered Benassis. "Science cannot save him, unless nature works a miracle. Our professors at the School of Medicine in Paris often used to speak to us of the phenomenon which you have just witnessed. Some maladies of this kind bring about changes in the voice-pro-





THE HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION IN SWITZERLAND  
FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT



ducing organs that give the sufferer a short-lived power of song that no trained voice can surpass. I have made you spend a melancholy day, sir," said the doctor when he was once more in the saddle. "Suffering and death everywhere, but everywhere also resignation. All these peasant folk take death philosophically; they fall ill, say nothing about it, and take to their beds like dumb animals. But let us say no more about death, and let us quicken our horses' paces a little; we ought to reach the town before nightfall, so that you may see the new quarter."

"Eh! some place is on fire over there," said Genestas, pointing to a spot on the mountain, where a sheaf of flames was rising.

"It is not a dangerous fire. Our lime-burner is heating his kiln, no doubt. It is a newly-started industry, which turns our heather to account."

There was a sudden report of a gun, followed by an involuntary exclamation from Benassis, who said, with an impatient gesture, "If that is Butifer, we shall see which of us two is the stronger."

"The shot came from that quarter," said Genestas, indicating a beechwood up above them on the mountain side. "Yes, up there; you may trust an old soldier's ear."

"Let us go there at once!" cried Benassis, and he made straight for the little wood, urging his horse at a furious speed across the ditches and fields, as if he were riding a steeple-chase, in his anxiety to catch the sportsman red-handed.

"The man you are after has made off," shouted Genestas, who could scarcely keep up with him.

Benassis wheeled his horse round sharply, and came back again. The man of whom he was in search soon appeared on the top of a perpendicular crag, a hundred feet above the level of the two horsemen.

"Butifer!" shouted Benassis when he saw that this figure carried a fowling-piece; "come down!"

Butifer recognized the doctor, and replied by a respectful and friendly sign which showed that he had every intention of obeying.

"I can imagine that if a man were driven to it by fear or by some overmastering impulse he might possibly contrive to scramble up to that point among the rocks," said Genestas; "but how will he manage to come down again?"

"I have no anxiety on that score," answered Benassis; "the wild goats must feel envious of that fellow yonder! You will see."

The emergencies of warfare had accustomed the commandant to gauge the real worth of men; he admired the wonderful quickness of Butifer's movements, the sure-footed grace with which the hunter swung himself down the rugged sides of the crag, to the top of which he had so boldly climbed. The strong, slender form of the mountaineer was gracefully poised in every attitude which the precipitous nature of the path compelled him to assume; and so certain did he seem of his power to hold on at need that, if the pinnacle of rock on which he took his stand had been a level floor, he could not have set his foot down upon it more calmly. He carried his fowling-piece as if it had been a light walking-cane. Butifer was a young man of middle height, thin, muscular, and in good training; his beauty was of a masculine order, which impressed Genestas on a closer view.

Evidently he belonged to the class of smugglers who ply their trade without resorting to violent courses, and who only exert patience and craft to defraud the government. His face was manly and sunburnt. His eyes, which were bright as an eagle's, were of a clear yellow color, and his sharply-cut nose with its slight curve at the tip was very much like an eagle's beak. His cheeks were covered with down, his red lips were half-open, giving a glimpse of a set of teeth of dazzling whiteness. His beard, mustache, and the reddish whiskers, which he allowed to grow, and which curled naturally, still

further heightened the masculine and forbidding expression of his face. Everything about him spoke of strength. He was broad-chested; constant activity had made the muscles of his hands curiously firm and prominent. There was the quick intelligence of a savage about his glances; he looked resolute, fearless, and imperturbable, like a man accustomed to put his life in peril, and whose physical and mental strength had been so often tried by dangers of every kind, that he no longer felt any doubts about himself. He wore a blouse that had suffered a good deal from thorns and briars, and he had a pair of leather soles bound to his feet by eel-skin thongs, and a pair of torn and tattered blue linen breeches through which his legs were visible, red, wiry, hard, and muscular as those of a stag.

"There you see the man who once fired a shot at me," Benassis remarked to the commandant, in a low voice. "If at this moment I were to signify to him my desire to be rid of any one, he would kill them without scruple. Butifer," he went on, addressing the poacher, "I fully believed you to be a man of your word; I pledged mine for you because I had your promise. My promise to the king's officer at Grenoble was based upon your vow never to go poaching again, and to turn over a new leaf and become a steady, industrious worker. You fired that shot just now, and here you are, on the Comte de Labranchoir's estate! Eh! you miscreant? Suppose his keeper had happened to hear you? It is a lucky thing for you that I shall take no formal cognizance of this offence; if I did, you would come up as an old offender, and of course you would have no gun license! I let you keep that gun of yours out of tenderness for your attachment to the weapon."

"It is a beauty," said the commandant, who recognized a duck gun from Saint Étienne.

The smuggler raised his head and looked at Genestas by way of acknowledging the compliment.



"Butifer," continued Benassis, "if your conscience does not reproach you, it ought to do so. If you are going to begin your old tricks again, you will find yourself once more in a park enclosed by four stone walls, and no power on earth will save you from the hulks; you will be a marked man, and your character will be ruined. Bring your gun to me to-night, I will take care of it for you."

Butifer gripped the barrel of his weapon in a convulsive clutch, and, after a few moments' reflection, he raised his face to the doctor's.

"You are quite right, sir," he said; "I have done wrong. I have broken bounds, I am a cur. My gun ought to go to you, but when you take it away from me, you take all that I have in the world. The last shot which my mother's son will fire shall be through my own head.—What would you have? I did as you wanted me. I kept quiet all the winter; but the spring came, and the sap rose. I am not used to day labor. It is not in my nature to spend my life in fattening fowls; I cannot stoop about turning over the soil for vegetables, nor flourish a whip and drive a cart, nor scrub down a horse in a stable all my life, so I must die of starvation, I suppose. I am only happy when I am up there," he went on after a pause, pointing to the mountains. "And I have been about among the hills for the past week; I got a sight of a chamois, and I have the chamois there," he said, pointing to the top of the crag; "it is at your service! Dear M. Benassis, leave me my gun. Listen! I will leave the commune, on my faith! I will go to the Alps; the chamois hunters will not say a word; on the contrary, they will receive me with open arms. I shall come to grief at the bottom of some glacier; but, if I am to speak my mind, I would rather live for a couple of years among the heights, where there are no governments, nor excisemen, nor gamekeepers, nor *procureurs du roi*, than grovel in a marsh for a century. You are the only one that I shall be sorry to leave behind; all the rest of them

bore me! When you are in the right, at any rate you don't worry one's life out——"

"And how about Louise?" asked Benassis. Butifer paused and turned thoughtful.

"Eh! learn to read and write, my lad," said Genestas; "come and enlist in my regiment, have a horse to ride, and turn carbineer. If they once sound 'to horse' for something like a war, you will find out that Providence made you to live in the midst of cannon, bullets, and battalions, and they will make a general of you."

"Ye-es, if Napoleon was back again," answered Butifer.

"You know our agreement," said the doctor. "At the second infraction of it, you undertook to go for a soldier. I give you six months in which to learn to read and write, and then I will look up some young gentleman who wants a substitute."

Butifer looked at the mountains.

"Oh! you shall not go to the Alps," cried Benassis. "A man like you, a man of his word, with plenty of good stuff in him, ought to serve his country and command a brigade, and not come to his end trailing after a chamois. The life that you are leading will take you straight to the convict's prison. After overfatiguing yourself, you are obliged to take a long rest; and, in the end, you will fall into idle ways that will be the ruin of any notions of orderly existence that you have; you will get into the habit of putting your strength to bad uses, and you will take the law into your own hands. I want to put you, in spite of yourself, into the right path."

"So I am to pine and fret myself to death? I feel suffocated whenever I am in a town. I cannot hold out for more than a day, in Grenoble, when I take Louise there," Butifer dejectedly replied.

"We all have our whims, which we must manage to control, or turn them to account for our neighbor's benefit. But it is late, and I am in a hurry. Come to see me to-morrow, and

bring your gun along with you. We will talk this over, my boy. Good-bye. Go and sell your chamois in Grenoble."

The two horsemen went on their way.

"That is what I call a man," said Genestas.

"A man in a bad way," answered Benassis. "But what help is there for it? You heard what he said. Is it not lamentable to see such fine qualities running to waste? If France were invaded by a foreign foe, Butifer at the head of a hundred young fellows would keep a whole division busy in Maurienne for a month; but in a time of peace the only outlets for his energy are those which set the law at defiance. He must wrestle with something; whenever he is not risking his neck he is at odds with society, he lends a helping hand to smugglers. The rogue will cross the Rhone, all by himself, in a little boat, to take shoes over into Savoy; he makes good his retreat, heavy laden as he is, to some inaccessible place high up among the hills, where he stays for two days at a time, living on dry crusts. In short, danger is as welcome to him as sleep would be to anybody else, and by dint of experience he has acquired a relish for extreme sensations that has totally unfitted him for ordinary life. It vexes me that a man like that should take a wrong turn and gradually go to the bad, become a bandit, and die on the gallows. But see, captain, how our village looks from here!"

Genestas obtained a distant view of a wide circular space, planted with trees, a fountain surrounded by poplars stood in the middle of it. Round the enclosure were high banks on which a triple line of trees of different kinds were growing; the first row consisted of acacias, the second of Japanese varnish trees, and some young elms grew on the highest row of all.

"That is where we hold our fair," said Benassis. "That is the beginning of the High Street, by those two handsome houses that I told you about; one belongs to the notary, and the other to the justice of the peace."

They came at that moment into a broad road, fairly evenly paved with large cobble-stones. There were altogether about a hundred new houses on either side of it, and almost every house stood in a garden.

The view of the church with its doorway made a pretty termination to this road. Two more roads had been recently planned out half-way down the course of the first, and many new houses had already been built along them. The town-hall stood opposite the parsonage, in the square by the church. As Benassis went down the road, women and children and men who had just finished their day's work promptly appeared in their doorways to wish him good-evening, the men took off their caps, and the little children danced and shouted about his horse, as if the animal's good-nature were as well known as the kindness of its master. The gladness was undemonstrative; there was the instinctive delicacy of all deep feeling about it, and it had the same persuasive power. At the sight of this welcome it seemed to Genestas that the doctor had been too modest in his description of the affection with which he was regarded by the people of the district. His truly was a sovereignty of the sweetest kind; a right royal sovereignty, moreover, for its title was engraven in the hearts of its subjects. However dazzling the rays of glory that surround a man, however great the power that he enjoys, in his inmost soul he soon comes to a just estimate of the sentiments that all external action causes for him. He very soon sees that no change has been wrought in him, that there is nothing new and nothing greater in the exercise of his physical faculties, and discovers his own real nothingness. Kings, even should they rule over the whole world, are condemned to live in a narrow circle like other men. They must even submit to the conditions of their lot, and their happiness depends upon the personal impressions that they receive. But Benassis met with nothing but good-will and loyalty throughout the district.

### III.

## THE NAPOLEON OF THE PEOPLE.

"PRAY, come in sir!" cried Jacquotte. "A pretty time the gentlemen have been waiting for you! It is always the way! You always manage to spoil the dinner for me whenever it ought to be particularly good. Everything is cooked to death by this time——"

"Oh! well, here we are," answered Benassis with a smile.

The two horsemen dismounted, and went off to the salon, where the guests invited by the doctor were assembled.

"Gentlemen," he said, taking Genestas by the hand, "I have the honor of introducing to you M. Bluteau, captain of a regiment of cavalry stationed at Grenoble—an old soldier, who has promised me that he will stay among us for a little while."

Then, turning to Genestas, he presented to him a tall, thin, gray-haired man, dressed in black.

"This gentleman," said Benassis, "is M. Dufau, the justice of the peace, of whom I have already spoken to you, and who has so largely contributed to the prosperity of the commune." Then he led his guest up to a pale, slight young man of middle height, who wore spectacles, and was also dressed in black. "And this is M. Tonnelet," he went on, "M. Gravier's son-in-law, and the first notary who came to live in the village."

The doctor next turned to a stout man, who seemed to belong half to the peasant, half to the middle class, the owner of a rough-pimpled but good-humored countenance.

"This is my worthy colleague, M. Cambon," he went on, "the timber merchant, to whom I owe the confidence and good-will of the people here. He was one of the promoters

of the road which you have admired. I have no need to tell you the profession of this gentleman," Benassis added, turning to the curate. "Here is a man whom no one can help loving."

There was an irresistible attraction in the moral beauty expressed by the curé's countenance, which engrossed Genestas' attention. Yet a certain harshness and austerity of outline might make M. Janvier's face seem displeasing at a first glance. His attitude, and his slight, emaciated frame, showed that he was far from strong physically, but the unchanging serenity of his face bore witness to the profound inward peace of the Christian and to the strength that comes from purity of heart. Heaven seemed to be reflected in his eyes, and the inextinguishable fervor of charity which glowed in his heart appeared to shine from them. The gestures that he made but rarely were simple and natural, his appeared to be a quiet and retiring nature, and there was a modesty and simplicity like that of a young girl about his actions. At first sight he inspired respect and a vague desire to be admitted to his friendship.

"Ah! M. le Maire," he said, bending as though to escape from Benassis' eulogium.

Something in the curé's tones brought a thrill to Genestas' heart, and the two insignificant words uttered by this stranger priest plunged him into musings that were almost devout.

"Gentlemen," said Jacquotte, who came into the middle of the room, and there took her stand, with her hands on her hips, "the soup is on the table."

Invited by Benassis, who summoned each in turn so as to avoid questions of precedence, the doctor's five guests went into the dining-room; and after the curé, in low and quiet tones, had repeated a *Benedicite*, they took their places at table. The cloth that covered the table was of that peculiar kind of damask linen invented in the time of Henry IV. by the brothers Graindorge, the skilful weavers, who gave their name to the

heavy fabric so well known to housekeepers. The linen was of dazzling whiteness, and fragrant with the scent of the thyme that Jacquotte always put in her washtubs. The dinner service was of white porcelain, edged with blue, and was in perfect order. The decanters were of the old-fashioned octagonal kind still in use in the provinces, though they have disappeared elsewhere. Grotesque figures had been carved on the horn handles of the knives. These relics of ancient splendor, which, nevertheless, looked almost new, seemed to those who scrutinized them to be in keeping with the kindly and open-hearted nature of the master of the house.

The lid of the soup-tureen drew a momentary glance from Genestas; he noticed that it was surmounted by a group of vegetables in high relief, and most skilfully colored after the manner of Bernard Palissy, the celebrated sixteenth century craftsman.

There was no lack of character about the group of men thus assembled. The powerful heads of Genestas and Benassis contrasted admirably with M. Janvier's apostolic countenance; and in the same fashion the elderly faces of the justice of the peace and the deputy-mayor brought out the youthfulness of the notary. Society seemed to be represented by these various types. The expression of each one indicated contentment with himself and with the present, and a faith in the future. M. Tonnelet and M. Janvier, who were still young, loved to make forecasts of coming events, for they felt that the future was theirs; while the other guests were fain rather to turn their talk upon the past. All of them faced the things of life seriously, and their opinions seemed to reflect a double tinge of soberness, on the one hand, from the twilight hues of wellnigh forgotten joys that could never more be revived for them; and, on the other, from the gray dawn which gave promise of a glorious day.

"You must have had a very tiring day, sir?" said M. Cambon, addressing the curé.

"Yes, sir," answered M. Janvier, "the poor crétin and Père Pelletier were buried at different hours."

"Now we can pull down all the hovels of the old village," Benassis remarked to his deputy. "When the space on which the houses stand has been grubbed up, it will mean at least another acre of meadow land for us; and, furthermore, there will be a clear saving to the commune of the hundred francs that it used to cost to keep Chautard the crétin."

"For the next three years we ought to lay out the hundred francs in making a single-span bridge to carry the lower road over the main stream," said M. Cambon. "The townsfolk and the people down the valley have fallen into the way of taking a short cut across that patch of land of Jean François Pastoureau's; before they have done they will cut it up in a way that will do a lot of harm to that poor fellow."

"I am sure that the money could not be put to a better use," said the justice of the peace. "In my opinion the abuse of the right of way is one of the worst nuisances in a country district. One-tenth of the cases that come before the court are caused by unfair easements. The rights of property are infringed in this way almost with impunity in many and many a commune. A respect for law and a respect for property are ideas too often disregarded in France, and it is most important that they should be inculcated. Many people think that there is something dishonorable in assisting the law to take its course. 'Go and be hanged somewhere else' is a saying which seems to be dictated by an unpraiseworthy generosity of feeling; but at bottom it is nothing but a hypocritical formula—a sort of veil which we throw over our own selfishness. Let us own to it, we lack patriotism! The true patriot is the citizen who is so deeply impressed with a sense of the importance of the laws that he will see them carried out even at his own cost and inconvenience. If you let the criminal go in peace, are you not making yourself answerable for the crimes he will commit?"



"It is all of a piece," said Benassis. "If the mayors kept their roads in better order, there would not be so many foot-paths. And if the members of the municipal councils knew a little better, they would uphold the small landowner and the mayor when the two combine to oppose the establishment of unfair easements. The fact that château, cottage, field and tree are all equally sacred would then be brought home in every way to the ignorant; they would be made to understand that right is just the same in all cases, whether the value of the property in question be large or small. But such salutary changes cannot be brought about all at once. They depend almost entirely on the moral condition of the population, which we can never completely reform without the potent aid of the curés. This remark does not apply to you in any way, M. Janvier."

"Nor do I take it to myself," laughed the curé. "Is not my heart set on bringing the teachings of the Catholic religion to co-operate with your plans of administration? For instance, I have often tried, in my pulpit discourses on theft, to imbue the folk of this parish with the very ideas of right to which you have just given utterance. For truly, God does not estimate theft by the value of the thing stolen, He looks at the thief. That has been the gist of the parables which I have tried to adapt to the comprehension of my parishioners."

"You have succeeded, sir," said Cambon. "I know the change you have brought about in people's ways of looking at things, for I can compare the commune as it is now with the commune as it used to be. There are certainly very few places where the laborers are as careful as ours are about keeping to time in their working hours. The cattle are well looked after; any damage that they do is done by accident. There is no pilfering in the woods, and finally you have made our peasants clearly understand that the leisure of the rich is the reward of a thrifty and hard-working life."

"Well, then," said Genestas, "you ought to be pretty well pleased with your infantry, M. le Curé."

"We cannot expect to find angels anywhere here below, captain," answered the priest. "Wherever there is poverty, there is suffering too; and suffering and poverty are strong compelling forces which have their abuses, just as power has. When the peasants have a couple of leagues to walk to their work, and have to tramp back wearily in the evening, they perhaps see sportsmen taking short cuts over ploughed land and pasture so as to be back to dinner a little sooner, and is it to be supposed that they will hesitate to follow the example? And of those who in this way beat out a footpath such as these gentlemen have just been complaining about, which are the real offenders, the workers or the people who are simply amusing themselves? Both the rich and the poor give us a great deal of trouble in these days. Faith, like power, ought always to descend from the heights above us, in heaven or on earth; and certainly in our times the upper classes have less faith in them than the mass of the people, who have God's promise of heaven hereafter as a reward for evils patiently endured. With due submission to ecclesiastical discipline, and deference to the views of my superiors, I think that for some time to come we should be less exacting as to questions of doctrine, and rather endeavor to revive the sentiment of religion in the hearts of the intermediary classes, who debate over the maxims of Christianity instead of putting them in practice. The philosophism of the rich has set a fatal example to the poor, and has brought about intervals of too long duration when men have faltered in their allegiance to God. Such ascendancy as we have over our flocks to-day depends entirely on our personal influence with them; is it not deplorable that the existence of religious belief in a commune should be dependent on the esteem in which a single man is held? When the preservative force of Christianity permeating all classes of society shall have put life into the

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new order of things, there will be an end of sterile disputes about doctrine. The cult of a religion is its form; societies only exist by forms. You have your standard, we have the cross——”

“I should very much like to know, sir,” said Genestas, breaking in upon M. Janvier, “why you forbid these poor folk to dance on Sunday?”

“We do not quarrel with dancing in itself, captain; it is forbidden because it leads to immorality, which troubles the peace of the countryside and corrupts its manners. Does not the attempt to purify the spirit of the family and to maintain the sanctity of family ties strike at the root of the evil?” contended the curé.

“Some irregularities are always to be found in every district I know,” said M. Tonnelet, “but they very seldom occur among us. Perhaps there are peasants who remove their neighbor’s landmark without much scruple; or they may cut a few osiers that belong to some one else, if they happen to want some; but these are mere peccadilloes compared with the wrongdoing that goes on among a town population. Moreover, the people in this valley seem to me to be devoutly religious.”

“Devout?” queried the curé with a smile; “there is no fear of fanaticism here.”

“But,” objected Cambon, “if the people all went to mass every morning, sir, and to confession every week, how would the fields be cultivated? And three priests would hardly be enough.”

“Work is prayer,” said the curé. “Doing one’s duty brings a knowledge of the religious principles which are a vital necessity to society.”

“How about patriotism?” asked Genestas.

“Patriotism can only inspire a short-lived enthusiasm,” the curate answered gravely; “religion gives it permanence. Patriotism consists in a brief impulse of forgetfulness of self

and self-interest, while Christianity is a complete system of opposition to the depraved tendencies of mankind."

"And yet, during the wars undertaken by the Revolution, patriotism——"

"Yes, we worked wonders at the time of the Revolution," said Benassis, interrupting Genestas; "but only twenty years later, in 1814, our patriotism was extinct; while, in former times, a religious impulse moved France and Europe to fling themselves upon Asia a dozen times in the course of a century."

"Maybe it is easier for two nations to come to terms when the strife has arisen out of some question of material interests," said the justice of the peace; "while wars undertaken with the idea of supporting dogmas are bound to be interminable, because the object can never clearly be defined."

"Well, sir, you are not helping any one to fish!" put in Jacquotte, who had removed the soup with Nicolle's assistance. Faithful to her custom, Jacquotte herself always brought in every dish one after another, a plan which had its drawbacks, for it compelled gluttonous folk to overeat themselves, and the more abstemious, having satisfied their hunger at an early stage, were obliged to leave the best part of the dinner untouched.

"Gentlemen," said the curé, with a glance at the justice of the peace, "how can you allege that religious wars have had no definite aim? Religion in olden times was such a powerful binding force that material interests and religious questions were inseparable. Every soldier, therefore, knew quite well what he was fighting for."

"If there has been so much fighting about religion," said Genestas, "God must have built up the system very perfunctorily. Should not a divine institution impress men at once by the truth that is in it?"

All the guests looked at the curé.

"Gentlemen," said M. Janvier, "religion is something

that is felt and that cannot be defined. We cannot know the purpose of the Almighty; we are no judges of the means He employs."

"Then, according to you, we are to believe in all your rigmaroles," said Genestas, with the easy good-humor of a soldier who has never given a thought to these things.

"The Catholic religion, better than any other, resolves men's doubts and fears; but even were it otherwise, I might ask you if you run any risks by believing in its truths?"

"None worth speaking of," answered Genestas.

"Good! and what risks do you not run by not believing? But let us talk of the worldly aspect of the matter, which most appeals to you. The finger of God is visible in human affairs; see how He directs them by the hand of His vicar on earth. How much men have lost by leaving the path traced out for them by Christianity! So few think of reading Church history, that erroneous notions deliberately sown among the people lead them to condemn the Church; yet the Church has been a pattern of perfect government such as men seek to establish to-day. The principle of election made it for a long while a great political power. Except the Catholic Church, there was no single religious institution which was founded upon liberty and equality. Everything was ordered to this end. The father-superior, the abbot, the bishop, the general of an order, and the pope were then chosen conscientiously for their fitness for the requirements of the Church. They were the expression of its intelligence, of the thinking power of the Church, and blind obedience was therefore their due. I will say nothing of the ways in which society has benefited by that power which has created modern nations and has inspired so many poems, so much music, so many cathedrals, statues, and pictures. I will simply call your attention to the fact that your modern systems of popular election, of two chambers, and of juries all had their origin in provincial and oecumenical councils, and in the episcopate and college of

cardinals ; but there is this difference—the views of civilization held by our present-day philosophy seem to me to fade away before the sublime and divine conception of Catholic communion, the type of a universal social communion brought about by the word and the fact that are combined in religious dogma. It would be very difficult for any modern political system, however perfect people may think it, to work once more such miracles as were wrought in those ages when the Church was the stay and support of the human intellect.”

“Why?” asked Genestas.

“Because, in the first place, if the principle of election is to be the basis of a system, absolute equality among the electors is a first requirement ; they ought to be ‘equal quantities,’ to make use of a mathematical term, and that is a state of things which modern politics will never bring about. Then, great social changes can only be effected by means of some common sentiment so powerful that it brings men into concerted action, while latter-day philosophism has discovered that law is based upon personal interest, which keeps men apart. Men full of the generous spirit that watches with tender care over the trampled rights of the suffering poor were more often found among the nations of past ages than in our generation. The priesthood, also, which sprang from the middle classes, resisted material forces and stood between the people and their enemies. But the territorial possessions of the Church and her temporal power, which seemingly made her position yet stronger, ended by crippling and weakening her action. As a matter of fact, if the priest has possessions and privileges, he at once appears in the light of an oppressor. He is paid by the State, therefore he is an official ; if he gives his time, his life, his whole heart, this is a matter of course, and nothing more than he ought to do ; the citizens expect and demand his devotion ; and the spontaneous kindliness of his nature is dried up. But let the priest be vowed to poverty, let him turn to his calling of his own free will, let him

stay himself on God alone, and have no resource on earth but the hearts of the faithful, and he becomes once more the missionary of America, he takes the rank of an apostle, he has all things under his feet. Indeed, the burden of wealth drags him down, and it is only by renouncing everything that he gains dominion over all men's hearts."

M. Janvier had compelled the attention of every one present. No one spoke; for all the guests were thoughtful. It was something new to hear such words as these in the mouth of a simple curé.

"There is one serious error, M. Janvier, among the truths to which you have given expression," said Benassis. "As you know, I do not like to raise discussions on points of general interest which modern authorities and modern writers have called in question. In my opinion, a man who has thought out a political system, and who is conscious that he has within him the power of applying it in practical politics, should keep his mind to himself, seize his opportunity and act; but if he dwells in peaceful obscurity as a simple citizen, is it not sheer lunacy to think to bring the great mass over to his opinion by means of individual discussions? For all that, I am about to argue with you, my dear pastor, for I am speaking before sensible men, each of whom is accustomed always to bring his individual light to a common search for the truth. My ideas may seem strange to you, but they are the outcome of much thought caused by the calamities of the last forty years. Universal suffrage, which finds such favor in the sight of those persons who belong to the constitutional opposition, as it is called, was a capital institution in the Church, because (as you yourself have just pointed out, dear pastor) the individuals of whom the Church was composed were all well educated, disciplined by religious feeling, thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the same system, well aware of what they wanted and whither they were going. But modern Liberalism rashly made war upon the prosperous government of the Bourbons, by

means of ideas which, should they triumph, would be the ruin of France and of the Liberals themselves. This is well known to the leaders of the Left, who are merely endeavoring to get the power into their own hands. If (which heaven forbid) the middle classes ranged under the banner of the opposition should succeed in overthrowing those social superiorities which are so repugnant to their vanity, another struggle would follow hard upon their victory. It would not be very long before the middle classes in their turn would be looked upon by the people as a sort of *noblesse*; they would be a sorry kind of *noblesse*, it is true, but their wealth and privileges would seem so much the more hateful in the eyes of the people because they would have a closer vision of these things. I do not say that the nation would come to grief in this struggle, but society would perish anew; for the day of triumph of a suffering people is always brief, and involves disorders of the worst kind. There would be no truce in a desperate strife arising out of an inherent or acquired difference of opinion among the electors. The less enlightened and more numerous portion would sweep away social inequalities, thanks to a system in which votes are reckoned by count and not by weight. Hence it follows that a government is never more strongly organized, and as a consequence is never more perfect, than when it has been established for the protection of privilege of the most restricted kind. By privilege I do not at this moment mean the old abuses by which certain rights were conceded to a few, to the prejudice of the many; no, I am using it to express the social circle of the governing class. The governing class is in some sort the heart of the state. But throughout creation nature has confined the vital principle within a narrow space, in order to concentrate its power; and so it is with the body politic. I will illustrate this thought of mine by examples. Let us suppose that there are a hundred peers in France, there are only one hundred causes of offence. Abolish the peerage, and all wealthy people will constitute the privileged class;



instead of a hundred, you will have ten thousand ; instead of removing class distinctions, you have merely widened the mischief. In fact, from the people's point of view, the right to live without working is in itself a privilege. The unproductive consumer is a robber in their eyes. The only work that they understand has palpable results ; they set no value on intellectual labor—the kind of labor which is the principal source of wealth to them. So by multiplying causes of offence in this way, you extend the field of battle ; the social war would be waged on all points instead of being confined within a limited circle ; and when attack and resistance become general, the ruin of a country is imminent. Because the rich will always be fewer in number, the victory will be to the poor as soon as it comes to actual fighting. I will throw the burden of proof on history.

“The institution of senatorial privilege enabled the Roman Republic to conquer the world. The senate preserved the tradition of authority. But when the *equites* and the *novi homines* had extended the governing class by adding to the numbers of the patricians, the state came to ruin. In spite of Sylla, and after the time of Julius Cæsar, Tiberius raised it into the Roman Empire ; the system was embodied in one man, and all authority was centred in him, a measure which prolonged the magnificent sway of the Roman for several centuries. The Emperor had ceased to dwell in Rome when the Eternal City fell into the hands of barbarians. When the conqueror invaded our country, the Franks who divided the land among themselves invented feudal privilege as a safeguard for property. The hundred or the thousand chiefs who owned the country established their institutions with a view to defending the rights gained by conquest. The duration of the feudal system was coexistent with the restriction of privilege. But when the *leudes* (an exact translation of the word *gentlemen*) from five hundred became fifty thousand, there came a revolution. The governing power was too

widely diffused ; it lacked force and concentration ; and they had not reckoned with the two powers, money and thought, that had set those free who had been beneath their rule. So the victory over the monarchical system, obtained by the middle classes with a view to extending the number of the privileged class, will produce its natural effect—the people will triumph in turn over the middle classes. If this trouble comes to pass, the indiscriminate right of suffrage bestowed upon the masses will be a dangerous weapon in their hands. The man who votes, criticises. An authority that is called in question is no longer an authority. Can you imagine a society without a governing authority? No, you cannot. Therefore, authority means force, and a basis of just judgment should underlie force. Such are the reasons which have led me to think that the principle of popular election is a most fatal one for modern governments. I think that my attachment to the poor and suffering classes has been sufficiently proved, and that no one will accuse me of bearing any ill-will towards them ; but though I admire the sublime patience and resignation with which they tread the path of toil, I must pronounce them to be unfit to take part in the government. The proletariats seem to me to be the minors of a nation, and ought to remain in a condition of tutelage. Therefore, gentlemen, the word *election*, to my thinking, is in a fair way to cause as much mischief as the words *conscience* and *liberty*, which, illy defined and illy understood, were flung broadcast among the people, to serve as watchwords of revolt and incitements to destruction. It seems to me to be a right and necessary thing that the masses should be kept in tutelage for the good of society."

"This system of yours runs so cleanly contrary to everybody's notions nowadays that we have some right to ask your reasons for it," said Genestas, interrupting the doctor.

"By all means, captain."

"What is this the master is saying?" cried Jacquotte, as

she went back to her kitchen. "There he is, the poor, dear man, and what is he doing but advising them to crush the people! And they are listening to him——"

"I would never have believed it of M. Benassis," answered Nicolle.

"If I require that the ignorant masses should be governed by a strong hand," the doctor resumed, after a brief pause, "I should desire at the same time that the framework of the social system should be sufficiently yielding and elastic to allow those who have the will and are conscious of their ability to emerge from the crowd, to rise and take their place among the privileged classes. The aim of power of every kind is its own preservation. In order to live, a government, to-day as in the past, must press the strong men of the nation into its service, taking them from every quarter, so as to make them its defenders, and to remove from among the people the men of energy who incite the masses to insurrection. By opening out in this way to the public ambition paths that are at once difficult and easy, easy for strong wills, difficult for weak or imperfect ones, a state averts the perils of the revolutions caused by the struggles of men of superior powers to rise to their proper level. Our long agony of forty years should have made it clear to any man who has brains that social superiorities are a natural outcome of the order of things. They are of three kinds that cannot be questioned—the superiority of the thinker, the superiority of the politician, the superiority of wealth. Is not that as much as to say genius, power, and money, or, in yet other words—the cause, the means, and the effect? But suppose a kind of social white tablet, every social unit perfectly equal, an increase of population everywhere in the same ratio, and give the same amount of land to each family; it would not be long before you would again have all the existing inequalities of fortune; it is glaringly evident, therefore, that there are such things as superiority of fortune, of thinking capacity, and of power, and we must make up our

minds to this fact ; but the masses will always regard rights that have been most honestly acquired as privileges, and as a wrong done to themselves.

"The *social contract* founded upon this basis will be a perpetual pact between those who have and those who have not. And acting on these principles, those who benefit by the laws will be the lawmakers, for they necessarily have the instinct of self-preservation, and foresee their dangers. It is even more to their interest than to the interest of the masses themselves that the latter should be quiet and contented. The happiness of the people should be ready made for the people. If you look at society as a whole from this point of view, you will soon see, as I do, that the privilege of election ought only to be exercised by men who possess wealth, power, or intelligence, and you will likewise see that the action of the deputies they may choose to represent them should be considerably restricted.

"The maker of laws, gentlemen, should be in advance of his age. It is his business to ascertain the tendency of erroneous notions popularly held, to see the exact direction in which the ideas of a nation are tending ; he labors for the future rather than for the present, and for the rising generation rather than for the one that is passing away. But if you call in the masses to make the laws, can they rise above their own level ? Nay. The more faithfully an assembly represents the opinions held by the crowd, the less it will know about government, the less lofty its ideas will be, and the more vague and vacillating its policy, for the crowd is and always will be simply a crowd, and this especially with us in France. Law involves submission to regulations ; man is naturally opposed to rules and regulations of all kinds, especially if they interfere with his interests ; so is it likely that the masses will enact laws that are contrary to their own inclinations ? No.

"Very often legislation ought to run counter to the pre-

vailing tendencies of the time. If the law is to be shaped by the prevailing habits of thought and tendencies of a nation, would not that mean that in Spain a direct encouragement would be given to idleness and religious intolerance; in England, to the commercial spirit; in Italy, to the love of the arts that may be the expression of society, but by which no society can entirely exist; in Germany, feudal class distinctions would be fostered; and here, in France, popular legislation would promote the spirit of frivolity, the sudden craze for an idea, and the readiness to split into factions, which has always been our bane?

“What has happened in the forty years since the electors took it upon themselves to make laws for France? We have something like forty thousand laws! A people with forty thousand laws might as well have none at all. Is it likely that five hundred mediocrities (for there are never more than a hundred great minds to do the work of any one century), is it likely that five hundred mediocrities will have the wit to rise to the level of these considerations? Not they! Here is a constant stream of men poured forth from five hundred different places; they will interpret the spirit of the law in divers manners, and there should be a unity of conception in the law.

“But I will go yet further. Sooner or later an assembly of this kind comes to be swayed by one man, and instead of a dynasty of kings, you have a constantly changing and costly succession of prime ministers. There comes a Mirabeau, or a Danton, a Robespierre, or a Napoleon, or proconsuls, or an emperor, and there is an end of deliberations and debates. In fact, it takes a determinate amount of force to raise a given weight; the force may be distributed, and you may have a less or greater number of levers, but it comes to the same thing in the end, the force must be in proportion to the weight. The weight in this case is the ignorant and suffering mass of people who form the lowest stratum of society. The

attitude of authority is bound to be repressive, and great concentration of the governing power is needed to neutralize the force of a popular movement. This is the application of a principle that I unfolded when I spoke just now of the way in which the class privileged to govern should be restricted. If this class is composed of men of ability, they will obey this natural law, and compel the country to obey. If you collect a crowd of mediocrities together, sooner or later they will fall under the dominion of a stronger head. A deputy of talent understands the reasons for which a government exists; the mediocre deputy simply comes to terms with force. An assembly either obeys an idea, like the Convention in the time of the Terror; a powerful personality, like the Corps Legislatif under the rule of Napoleon; or falls under the domination of a system or of wealth, as it has done in our own day. The Republican Assembly, that dream of some innocent souls, is an impossibility. Those who would fain bring it to pass are either grossly deluded dupes or would-be tyrants. Do you not think that there is something ludicrous about an assembly which gravely sits in debate upon the perils of a nation which ought to be roused into immediate action? It is only right of course that the people should elect a body of representatives who will decide questions of supplies and of taxation; this institution has always existed, under the sway of the most tyrannous ruler no less than under the sceptre of the mildest of princes. Money is not to be taken by force; there are natural limits to taxation, and if they are overstepped, a nation either rises up in revolt or lays itself down to die. Again, if this elective body, changing from time to time, according to the needs and ideas of those whom it represents, should refuse obedience to a bad law in the name of the people, well and good. But to imagine that five hundred men, drawn from every corner of the kingdom, will make a good law! Is it not a dreary joke, for which the people will sooner or later have to pay? They have a change of masters, that is all.

“Authority ought to be given to one man, he alone should have the task of making the laws; and he should be a man who, by force of circumstances, is continually obliged to submit his actions to general approbation. But the only restraints that can be brought to bear upon the exercise of power, be it the power of the one, of the many, or of the multitude, are to be found in the religious institutions of a country. Religion forms the only adequate safeguard against the abuse of supreme power. When a nation ceases to believe in religion, it becomes ungovernable in consequence, and its prince perforce becomes a tyrant. The chambers that occupy an intermediate place between rulers and their subjects are powerless to prevent these results, and can only mitigate them to a very slight extent; assemblies, as I have said before, are bound to become the accomplices of tyranny on the one hand, or of insurrection on the other. My own leanings are towards a government by one man; but though it is good, it cannot be absolutely good, for the results of every policy will always depend upon the condition and the beliefs of the nation. If a nation is in its dotage, if it has been corrupted to the core by philosophism and the spirit of discussion, it is on the high road to despotism, from which no form of free government will save it. And, at the same time, a righteous people will nearly always find liberty even under a despotic rule. All this goes to show the necessity for restricting the right of election within very narrow limits, the necessity for a strong government, the necessity for a powerful religion which makes the rich man the friend of the poor, and enjoins upon the poor an absolute submission to their lot. It is, in fact, really imperative that the assemblies should be deprived of all direct legislative power, and should confine themselves to the registration of laws and to questions of taxation.

“I know that different ideas from these exist in many minds. To-day, as in past ages, there are enthusiasts who seek for perfection, and who would like to have society better

ordered than it is at present. But innovations which tend to bring about a kind of social topsy-turvydom, ought only to be undertaken by general consent. Let the innovators have patience. When I remember how long it has taken Christianity to establish itself; how many centuries it has taken to bring about a purely moral revolution which surely ought to have been accomplished peacefully, the thought of the horrors of a revolution, in which material interests are concerned, makes me shudder, and I am for maintaining existing institutions. 'Each shall have his own thought' is the dictum of Christianity; 'Each man shall have his own field' says modern law; and in this, modern law is in harmony with Christianity. Each shall have his own thought; that is a consecration of the rights of intelligence; and each shall have his own field is a consecration of the right to property that has been acquired by toil. Hence our society. Nature has based human life upon the instinct of self-preservation, and social life is founded upon personal interest. Such ideas as these are, to my thinking, the very rudiments of politics. Religion keeps these two selfish sentiments in subordination by the thought of a future life; and in this way the harshness of the conflict of interests has been somewhat softened. God has mitigated the sufferings that arise from social friction by a religious sentiment which raises self-forgetfulness into a virtue; just as He has moderated the friction of the mechanism of the universe by laws which we do not know. Christianity bids the poor bear patiently with the rich, and commands the rich to lighten the burdens of the poor; these few words, to my mind, contain the essence of all laws, human and divine!"

"I am no statesman," said the notary; "I see in a ruler a liquidator of society which should always remain in liquidation; he should hand over to his successor the exact value of the assets which he received."

"I am no statesman either," said Benassis, hastily interrupting the notary. "It takes nothing but a little common



sense to better the lot of a commune, of a canton, or of an even wider district ; a department calls for some administrative talent, but all these four spheres of action are comparatively limited, the outlook is not too wide for ordinary powers of vision, and there is a visible connection between their interests and the general progress made by the state.

“ But in yet higher regions, everything is on a larger scale, the horizon widens, and from the standpoint where he is placed, the statesman ought to grasp the whole situation. It is only necessary to consider liabilities due ten years hence, in order to bring about a great deal of good in the case of the department, the district, the canton, or the commune ; but when it is a question of the destinies of a nation, a statesman must foresee a more distant future and the course that events are likely to take for the next hundred years. The genius of a Colbert or of a Sully avails nothing, unless it is supported by the energetic will that makes a Napoleon or a Cromwell. A great minister, gentlemen, is a great thought written at large over all the years of a century of prosperity and splendor for which he has prepared the way. Steadfast perseverance is the virtue of which he stands most in need ; and in all human affairs does not steadfast perseverance indicate a power of the very highest order ? We have had for some time past too many men who think only of the ministry instead of the nation, so that we cannot but admire the real statesman as the sublimest of human poetry. Ever to look beyond the present moment, to foresee the ways of destiny, to care so little for power that he only retains it because he is conscious of his usefulness, while he does not overestimate his strength ; ever to lay aside all personal feeling and low ambitions, so that he may always be master of his faculties, and foresee, will, and act without ceasing ; to compel himself to be just and impartial, to keep order on a large scale, to silence his heart that he may be guided by his intellect alone, to be neither apprehensive nor sanguine, neither suspicious

nor confiding, neither grateful nor ungrateful, never to be unprepared for an event, nor taken unawares by an idea; to live, in fact, with the requirements of the masses ever in his mind; to spread the protecting wings of his thought above them, to sway them by the thunder of his voice and the keenness of his glance; seeing all the while not the details of affairs, but the great issues at stake, is not that to be something more than a mere man? Therefore the names of the great and noble fathers of nations cannot but be household words for ever."

There was silence for a moment, during which the guests looked at one another.

"Gentlemen, you have not said a word about the army," cried Genestas. "A military organization seems to me to be the real type on which all good civil society should be modeled; the sword is the guardian of a nation."

The justice of the peace laughed softly.

"Captain," he said, "an old lawyer once said that empires began with the sword and ended with the desk; we have reached the desk stage by this time."

"And now that we have settled the fate of the world, gentlemen, let us change the subject. Come, captain, a glass of Hermitage," cried the doctor, laughing.

"Two, rather than one," said Genestas, holding out his glass. "I mean to drink them both to your health—to a man who does honor to the species."

"And who is dear to all of us," said the curé in gentle tones.

"Do you mean to force me into the sin of pride, M. Janvier?"

"M. le curé has only said in a low voice what all the canton says aloud," said Cambon.

"Gentlemen, I propose that we take a walk to the parsonage by moonlight, and see M. Janvier home," said the justice of the peace, rising from the table.

"Let us start," said the guests, and they prepared to accompany the curé.

"Shall we go to the barn?" said the doctor, laying a hand on Genestas' arm. They had taken leave of the curé and the other guests. "You will hear them talking about Napoleon, Captain Bluteau. Goguelat, the postman, is there, and there are several of his cronies who are sure to draw him out on the subject of the idol of the people. Nicolle, my stableman, has set a ladder so that we can climb up on the hay; there is a place from which we can look down on the whole scene. Come along, an up-sitting is something worth seeing, believe me. It will not be the first time that I have hidden in the hay to overhear a soldier's tales or the stories that peasants tell among themselves. We must be careful to keep out of sight though, as these good folk turn shy and put on company manners as soon as they see a stranger," suggested Benassis, as they proceeded towards the barn.

"Eh! my dear sir," said Genestas, "have I not often pretended to be asleep so as to hear my troopers talking out on bivouac? My word, I once heard a droll yarn reeled off by an old quartermaster for some conscripts who were afraid of war; I never laughed so heartily in any theatre in Paris. He was telling them about the retreat from Moscow; he told them that the army had nothing but the clothes they stood up in, that their wine was iced, that the dead stood stock-still in the road just where they were, that they had seen White Russia, and that they currycombed the horses there with their teeth, that those who were fond of skating had fine times of it, and people who had a fancy for savory ices had as much as they could put away, that the women were generally poor company, but that the only thing they could really complain of was the want of hot water for shaving. In fact, he told them such a pack of absurdities that even an old quartermaster who had lost his nose with a frostbite, so that they had dubbed him Nosey, was fain to laugh."

"Hush!" said Benassis, "here we are. I will go first; follow after me."

Both of them scaled the ladder and hid themselves in the hay, in a place whence they could have a good view of the party below, who had not heard a sound overhead. Little groups of women were clustered about three or four candles. Some of them sewed, others were spinning, while a few of them were doing nothing, and sat with their heads stretched forward, and their eyes fixed on an old peasant who was telling a story. The men were standing about for the most part, or lying at full length on the trusses of hay. Every group was absolutely silent. Their faces were barely visible by the flickering gleams of the candles by which the women were working, although each candle was surrounded by a glass globe filled with water, in order to concentrate the light. The thick darkness and shadow that filled the roof and all the upper part of the barn seemed still further to diminish the light that fell here and there upon the workers' heads with such picturesque effects of light and shade. Here, it shone full upon the bright wondering eyes and brown forehead of a little peasant maiden; and there the straggling beams brought out the outlines of the rugged brows of some of the older men, throwing up their figures in sharp relief against the dark background, and giving a fantastic appearance to their worn and weather-stained garb. The attentive attitude of all these people and the expression on all their faces showed that they had given themselves up entirely to the pleasure of listening, and that the narrator's sway was absolute. It was a curious scene. The immense influence that poetry exerts over every mind was plainly to be seen. For is not the peasant who demands that the tale of wonder should be simple, and that the impossible should be wellnigh credible, a lover of poetry of the purest kind?

"She did not like the looks of the house at all," the peasant was saying as the two newcomers took their places where they

could overhear him; "but the poor little hunchback was so tired out with carrying her bundle of hemp to market that she went in; besides, the night had come, and she could go no further. She only asked to be allowed to sleep there, and ate nothing but a crust of bread that she took from her wallet. And inasmuch as the woman who kept house for the brigands knew nothing about what they had planned to do that night, she let the old woman into the house, and sent her upstairs without a light. Our hunchback throws herself down on a rickety truckle bed, says her prayers, thinks about her hemp, and is dropping off to sleep. But before she is fairly asleep, she hears a noise, and in walk two men carrying a lantern, and each man had a knife in his hand. Then fear came upon her; for in those times, look you, they used to make *pâtés* of human flesh for the seigneurs, who were very fond of them. But the old woman plucked up heart again, for she was so thoroughly shriveled and wrinkled that she thought they would think her a poorish sort of diet. The two men went past the hunchback and walked up to a bed that there was in the great room, and in which they had put the gentleman with the big portmanteau, the one that passed for a 'negromancer.' The taller man holds up the lantern and takes the gentleman by the feet, and the short one, that had pretended to be drunk, clutches hold of his head and cuts his throat, clean, with one stroke, swish! Then they leave the head and body lying in its own blood up there, steal the portmanteau, and go downstairs with it. Here is our woman in a nice fix! First of all she thinks of slipping out before any one can suspect it, not knowing that Providence had brought her there to glorify God and to bring down punishment on the murderers. She was in a great fright, and when one is frightened one thinks of nothing else. But the woman of the house had asked the two brigands about the hunchback, and that had alarmed them. So back they come, creeping softly up the wooden staircase. The poor hunchback curls up in a ball

with fright, and she hears them talking about her in low whispers.

“ ‘Kill her, I tell you.’

“ ‘No need to kill her.’

“ ‘Kill her !’

“ ‘No !’

“ Then they come in. The woman, who was no fool, shuts her eyes and pretends to be asleep. She sets to work to sleep like a child, with her hand on her heart, and takes to breathing like a cherub. The man opens the lantern and shines the light straight into the eyes of the sleeping old woman—she does not move an eyelash, she is in such terror for her neck.

“ ‘She is sleeping like a log ; you can see that quite well,’ so says the tall one.

“ ‘Old women are so cunning !’ answers the short man. ‘I will kill her. We shall feel easier in our minds. Besides, we will salt her down to feed the pigs.’

“ The old woman hears all this talk, but she does not stir.

“ ‘Oh ! it is all right, she is asleep,’ says the short ruffian, when he saw that the hunchback had not stirred.

“ That is how the old woman saved her life. And she may be fairly called courageous ; for it is a fact that there are not many girls here who could have breathed like cherubs while they heard that going on about the pigs. Well, the two brigands set to work to lift up the dead man ; they wrap him round in the sheets and chuck him out into the little yard ; and the old woman hears the pigs scampering up to eat him, and grunting, *Hon & hon &*

“ So when morning comes,” the narrator resumed after a pause, “ the woman gets up and goes down, paying a couple of *sous* for her bed. She takes up her wallet, goes on just as if nothing had happened, asks for the news of the countryside, and gets away in peace. She wants to run. Running is quite out of the question, her legs fail her for fright ; and lucky it was for her that she could not run, for this reason : She had

barely gone half a quarter of a league before she sees one of the brigands coming after her, just out of craftiness to make quite sure that she had seen nothing. She guesses this, and sits herself down on a boulder.

“ ‘What is the matter, good woman?’ asks the short one, for it was the shorter one and the wickeder of the two who was dogging her.

“ ‘Oh! master,’ says she, ‘my wallet is so heavy, and I am so tired, that I badly want some good man to give me his arm’ (sly thing, only listen to her!) ‘if I am to get back to my poor home.’

“Thereupon the brigand offers to go along with her, and she accepts his offer. The fellow takes hold of her arm to see if she is afraid. Not she! She does not tremble a bit, and walks quietly along. So there they are, chatting away as nicely as possible, all about farming, and the way to grow hemp, till they come to the outskirts of the town, where the hunchback lived, and the brigand made off for fear of meeting some of the sheriff’s people. The woman reached her house at mid-day, and waited there till her husband came home; she thought and thought over all that had happened on her journey and during the night. The hemp-grower came home in the evening. He was hungry; something must be got ready for him to eat. So while she greases her frying-pan, and gets ready to fry something for him, she tells him how she sold her hemp, and gabbles away as females do, but not a word does she say about the pigs, nor about the gentleman who was murdered and robbed and eaten. She holds her frying-pan in the flames so as to clean it, draws it out again to give it a wipe, and finds it full of blood.

“ ‘What have you been putting into it?’ says she to her man.

“ ‘Nothing,’ says he.

“She thinks it must have been a nonsensical piece of woman’s fancy, and puts her frying-pan into the fire again.—Bang! A head comes tumbling down the chimney!

“‘Oh! look! It is nothing more nor less than the dead man’s head,’ says the old woman. ‘How he stares at me! What does he want!’

“‘*You must avenge me!*’ says a voice.

“‘What an idiot you are!’ said the hemp-grower. ‘Always seeing something or other that has no sort of sense about it! Just you all over.’

“He takes up the head, which snaps at his finger, and pitches it out into the yard.

“‘Get on with my omelette,’ he says, ‘and do not bother yourself about that. ’Tis a cat.’

“‘A cat!’ says she; ‘it was as round as a ball.’

“She puts back her frying-pan on the fire.—Bang! Down comes a leg this time, and they go through the whole story again. The man was no more astonished at the leg than he had been at the head; he snatched up the leg and also threw it out the door. Before they had finished, the other leg, both arms, the body, the whole murdered traveler, in fact, came down piecemeal. No omelette all this time! The old hemp-seller grew very hungry indeed.

“‘By my salvation!’ said he, ‘when once my omelette is made we will see about satisfying that man yonder.’

“‘So you admit, now, that it was a man?’ said the hunchback wife. ‘What made you say that it was not a head a minute ago, you great worry?’

“The woman breaks the eggs, fries the omelette, and dishes it up without any more grumbling; somehow this squabble began to make her feel very uncomfortable. Her husband sits down and begins to eat. The hunchback was frightened, and said that she was not hungry.

“‘Tap! tap!’ There was a stranger rapping at the door.

“‘Who is there?’

“‘The man that died yesterday!’

“‘Come in,’ answers the hemp-grower.

“So the traveler comes in, sits himself down on a three-



legged stool, and says: 'Are you mindful of God, who gives eternal peace to those who confess His name? Woman! You saw me done to death, and you have said nothing! I have been eaten by the pigs! The pigs do not enter Paradise, and therefore I, a Christian man, shall go down into hell, all because a woman forsooth will not speak, a thing that has never been known before. You must deliver me,' and so on, and so on.

"The woman, who was more and more frightened every minute, cleaned her frying-pan, put on her Sunday clothes, went to the justice, and told him about the crime, which was brought to light, and the robbers were broken on the wheel in proper style in the market-place. This good work accomplished, the woman and her husband always had the finest hemp you ever set eyes on. Then, which pleased them still better, they had something that they had wished for for a long time, to wit, a man-child, who in course of time became a great lord of the king.

"That is the true story of 'The Courageous Hunchback Woman.'"

"I do not like stories of that sort; they make me dream at night," said La Fosseuse. "Napoleon's adventures are much nicer, I think."

"Quite true," said the keeper. "Come now, M. Goguelat, tell us about the Emperor."

"The evening is too far gone," said the postman, "and I do not care about cutting short the story of a victory."

"Never mind, let us hear about it all the same! We know the stories, for we have heard you tell them many a time; but it is always a pleasure to hear them."

"Tell us about the Emperor!" cried several voices at once.

"You will have it?" answered Goguelat. "Very good, but you will see that there is no sense in the story when it is gone through at a gallop. I would rather tell you all about a single battle. Shall it be Champ-Aubert, where we ran out

of cartridges, and furbished them just the same with the bayonet?"

"No, the Emperor! the Emperor!"

The old infantry man got up from his truss of hay and glanced round about on those assembled, with the peculiar sombre expression in which may be read all the miseries, adventures, and hardships of an old soldier's career. He took his coat by the two skirts in front, and raised them, as if it were a question of once more packing up the knapsack in which his kit, his shoes, and all he had in the world used to be stowed; for a moment he stood leaning all his weight on his left foot, then he swung the right foot forward, and yielded with a good grace to the wishes of his audience. He swept his gray hair to one side, so as to leave his forehead bare, and flung back his head and gazed upwards, as if to raise himself to the lofty height of the gigantic story that he was about to tell.

"Napoleon, you see, my friends, was born in Corsica, which is a French island warmed by the Italian sun; it is like a furnace there, everything is scorched up, and they keep on killing each other from father to son for generations all about nothing at all—'tis a notion they have. To begin at the beginning, there was something extraordinary about the thing from the first; it occurred to his mother, who was the handsomest woman of her time, and a shrewd soul, to dedicate him to God, so that he should escape all the dangers of infancy and of his after-life; for she had dreamed that the world was on fire on the day he was born. It was a prophecy! So she asked God to protect him, on condition that Napoleon should re-establish His holy religion, which had been thrown to the ground just then. That was the agreement; we shall see what came of it.

"Now, do you follow me carefully, and tell me whether what you are about to hear is natural.

"It is certain sure that only a man who had had imagina-

tion enough to make a mysterious compact would be capable of going further than anybody else, and of passing through volleys of grapeshot and showers of bullets which carried us off like flies, but which had a respect for his head. I myself had particular proof of that at Eylau. I see him yet ; he climbs a hillock, takes his field-glass, looks along our lines, and says, 'That is going on all right.' One of your deep fellows, with a bunch of feathers in his cap, used to plague him a good deal from all accounts, following him about everywhere, even when he was getting his meals. This fellow wants to do something clever, so as soon as the Emperor goes away he takes his place. Oh ! swept away in a moment ! And that is the last of the bunch of feathers ! You understand quite clearly that Napoleon had undertaken to keep his secret to himself. That is why those who accompanied him, and even his especial friends, used to drop like nuts : Duroc, Bessières, Lannes—men as strong as bars of steel, which he cast into shape for his own ends. And here is a final proof that he was the child of God, created to be the soldier's father ; for no one ever saw him as a lieutenant or a captain. He is a commandant straight off ! Ah ! yes, indeed ! He did not look more than four-and-twenty, but he was an old general ever since the taking of Toulon, when he made a beginning by showing the rest that they knew nothing about handling cannon. The next thing he does he tumbles upon us. A little slip of a general-in-chief of the army of Italy, which had neither bread nor ammunition nor shoes nor clothes—a wretched army as naked as a worm.

" ' Friends,' he said, ' here we all are together. Now, get it well into your pates that in a fortnight's time from now you will be the victors, and dressed in new clothes ; you shall all have greatcoats, strong gaiters, and famous pairs of shoes ; but, my children, you will have to march on Milan to take them, where all these things are.'

" So they marched. The French, crushed as flat as a pan-

cake, held up their heads again. There were thirty thousand of us tatterdemalions against eighty thousand swaggerers of Germans—fine tall men and well equipped ; I can see them yet. Then Napoleon, who was only Bonaparte in those days, breathed goodness knows what into us, and on we marched night and day. We rapped their knuckles at Montenotte ; we hurry on to thrash them at Rivoli, Lodi, Arcola, and Millesimo, and we never let them go. The army came to have a liking for winning battles. Then Napoleon hems them in on all sides, these German generals did not know where to hide themselves so as to have a little peace and comfort ; he drubs them soundly, cribs ten thousand of their men at a time by surrounding them with fifteen hundred Frenchmen, whom he makes to spring up after his fashion, and at last he takes their cannon, victuals, money, ammunition, and everything they have that is worth taking ; he pitches them into the water, he beats them on the mountains, snaps at them in the air, gobbles them up on the earth, and thrashes them everywhere.

“There are the troops in full feather again ! For, look you, the Emperor (who, for that matter, was a wit) soon sent for the inhabitant, and told him that he had come there to deliver him. Whereupon the civilian finds us free quarters and makes much of us, so do the women, who showed great discernment. To come to a final end ; in Ventose '96, which was at that time what the month of March is now, we had been driven up into a corner of the *Pays des Marmottes* ; but after the campaign, lo and behold ! we were the masters of Italy, just as Napoleon had prophesied. And in the month of March following, in one year and in two campaigns, he brings us within sight of Vienna ; we had made a clean sweep of them. We had gobbled down three armies one after another, and taken the conceit out of four Austrian generals ; one of them, an old man who had white hair, had been roasted like a rat in the straw before Mantua. The kings were suing for mercy on their knees. Peace had been won. Could a mere

mortal have done that? No. God helped him, that is certain. He distributed himself about like the five loaves in the Gospel, commanded on the battlefield all day, and drew up his plans at night. The sentries always saw him coming and going; he neither ate nor slept. Therefore, recognizing these prodigies, the soldier adopts him for his father. But, forward!

“The other folk there in Paris, seeing all this, say among themselves—

“‘Here is a pilgrim who appears to take his instructions from heaven above; he is uncommonly likely to lay a hand on France. We must let him loose on Asia or America, and that, perhaps, will keep him quiet.’

“The same thing was decreed for him as for Jesus Christ; for, as a matter of fact, they give him orders to go on duty down in Egypt. See his resemblance to the Son of God! That is not all, though. He calls all his fire-eaters about him, all those into whom he had more particularly put the devil, and talks to them in this way—

“‘My friends, for the time being they are giving us Egypt to stop our mouths. But we will swallow down Egypt in a brace of shakes, just as we swallowed Italy, and private soldiers shall be princes, and shall have broad lands of their own. Forward!’

“‘Forward, lads!’ cry the sergeants.

“So we come to Toulon on the way to Egypt. Whereupon the English put to sea with all their fleet. But when we are on board, Napoleon says to us—

“‘They will not see us; and it is right and proper that you should know henceforward that your general has a star in the sky that guides us and watches over us!’

“So said, so done. As we sailed over the sea we took Malta, by way of an orange to quench his thirst for victory, for he was a man who must always be doing something. There we are in Egypt. Well and good. Different orders.

The Egyptians, look you, are men who, ever since the world has been the world, have been in the habit of having giants to reign over them, and armies like swarms of ants; because it is a country full of genii and crocodiles, where they have built up pyramids as big as our mountains; the fancy took them to stow their kings under the pyramids, so as to keep them fresh, a thing which mightily pleases them all round out there. Whereupon, as we landed, the Little Corporal said to us—

“ ‘ My children, the country which you are about to conquer worships a lot of idols which you must respect, because the Frenchman ought to be on good terms with all the world, and fight people without giving annoyance. Get it well into your heads to let everything alone at first; for we shall have it all bye and bye! And forward!’ ”

“ So far so good. But all those people had heard a prophecy of Napoleon, under the name of *Kebir Bonaberdis*, a word which in their lingo means, ‘ The sultan fires a shot,’ and they feared him like the devil. So the Grand Turk, Asia, and Africa have recourse to magic, and they send a demon against us, named the Mahdi, who it was thought had come down from heaven on a white charger which, like its master, was bullet-proof, and the pair of them lived on the air of that part of the world. There are people who have seen them, but for my part I cannot give you any certain information about them. They were the divinities of Arabia and of the Mamelukes who wished their troopers to believe that the Mahdi had the power of preventing them from dying in battle. They gave out that he was an angel sent down to wage war on Napoleon, and to get back Solomon’s seal, part of their paraphernalia which they pretended our general had stolen. You will readily understand that we made them cry *peccati* (I have sinned) all the same.

“ Ah, just tell me now how they came to know about that compact of Napoleon’s? Was that natural?

“They took it into their heads for certain that he commanded the genii, and that he went from place to place like a bird in the twinkling of an eye; and it is a fact that he was everywhere. At length it came about that he carried off a queen of theirs. She was the private property of a Mameluke, who, although he had several more of them, flatly refused to strike a bargain, though ‘the other’ offered all his treasures for her and diamonds as big as pigeons’ eggs. When things had come to that pass, they could not well be settled without a good deal of fighting; and there was fighting enough for everybody and no mistake about it.

“Then we are drawn up before Alexandria, and again at Gizeh, and before the pyramids. We had to march over the sands and in the sun; people whose eyes dazzled used to see water that they could not drink and shade that made them fume. But we made short work of the Mamelukes as usual, and everything goes down before the voice of Napoleon, who seizes upper and lower Egypt and Arabia, far and wide, till we came to the capitals of kingdoms which no longer existed, where there were thousands and thousands of statues of all the devils in creation, all done to the life, and another curious thing too, any quantity of lizards. A confounded country where any one could have as many acres of land as he wished for as little as he pleased.

“While he was busy inland, where he meant to carry out some wonderful ideas of his, the English burn his fleet for him in Aboukir Bay, for they never could do enough to annoy us. But Napoleon, who was respected east and west, and called ‘my son’ by the Pope, and ‘my dear father,’ by Mahomet’s cousin, makes up his mind to have his revenge on England, and to take India in exchange for his fleet. He set out to lead us into Asia, by way of the Red Sea, through a country where there were palaces for halting-places, and nothing but gold and diamonds to pay the troops with, when the Mahdi comes to an understanding with the plague, and

sends it among us to make a break in our victories. Halt ! Then every man files off to that parade from which no one comes back on his two feet. The dying soldier cannot take Acre, into which he forces an entrance three times with a warrior's impetuous enthusiasm ; the plague was too strong for us ; there was not even time to say ' your servant, sir,' to the plague. Every man was down with it. Napoleon alone was as fresh as a rose ; the whole army saw him drinking in the plague without its doing him any harm whatever.

" There now, my friends, was that natural, do you think ?

" The Mamelukes, knowing that we were all on the sick-list, want to stop our road ; but it was no use trying that nonsense with Napoleon. So he spoke to his familiars, who had tougher skins than the rest—

" ' Go and clear the road for me.'

" Junot, who was his devoted friend, and a first-class fighter, only takes a thousand men, and makes a clean sweep of the Pacha's army, which had the impudence to bar our way. Thereupon back we come to Cairo, our headquarters, and now for another story :

" Napoleon being out of the country, France allowed the people in Paris to worry the life out of her. They kept back the soldiers' pay and all their linen and clothing, left them to starve, and expected them to lay down law to the universe, without taking any further trouble in the matter. They were idiots of the kind that amuse themselves with chattering instead of setting themselves to knead the dough. So our armies were defeated, France could not keep her frontiers ; The Man was not there. I say The Man, look you, because that was how they called him ; but it was stuff and nonsense, for he had a star of his own and all his other peculiarities, it was the rest of us that were mere men. He hears this history of France after his famous battle of Aboukir, where with a single division he routed the grand army of the Turks, twenty-five thousand strong, and jostled more than half of them into the



sea ; arrah ! without losing more than three hundred of his own men. That was his last thunder-clap in Egypt. He said to himself, seeing that all was lost down there, ' I know that I am the saviour of France, and to France I must go.'

" But you must clearly understand that the army did not know of his departure ; for if they had, they would have kept him there by force to make him Emperor of the East. So there we all are without him, and in low spirits, for he was the life of us. He leaves Kléber in command, a great watchdog, who passed in his checks at Cairo, murdered by an Egyptian whom they put to death by spiking him with a bayonet, which is their way of guillotining people out there ; but he suffered so much that a soldier took pity on the scoundrel and handed his flask to him ; and the Egyptian turned up his eyes then and there with all the pleasure in life. But there is not much fun for us about this little affair. Napoleon steps aboard of a little cockleshell, a mere nothing of a skiff, called the *Fortune*, and in the twinkling of an eye, and in the teeth of the English, who were blockading the place with vessels of the line and cruisers and everything that carries canvas, he lands in France, for he always had the faculty of taking the sea at a stride. Was that natural ? Bah ! as soon as he is landed at Fréjus, it is as good as saying that he has set foot in Paris. Everybody there worships him ; but he calls the government together.

" ' What have you done to my children, the soldiers ? ' he says to the lawyers. ' You are a set of good-for-nothings who make fools of other people, and feather your own nests at the expense of France. It will not do. I speak in the name of every one who is discontented.'

" Thereupon they want to put him off and to get rid of him ; but not a bit of it ! He locks them up in the barracks where they used to argufy and makes them jump out of the windows. Then he makes them follow in his train, and they all become as mute as fishes and supple as tobacco pouches.

So he becomes Consul at a blow. He was not the man to doubt the existence of the Supreme Being; he kept his word with Providence, who had kept His promise in earnest; he sets up religion again, and gives back the churches, and they ring the bells for God and Napoleon. So every one is satisfied; *primo*, the priests with whom he allows no one to meddle; *segondo*, the merchant folk who carry on their trades without fear of the *rapiamus* of the law that had pressed too heavily on them; *tertio*, the nobles; for people had fallen into an unfortunate habit of putting them to death, and he puts a stop to this.

"But there were enemies to be cleared out of the way, and he was not the one to go to sleep after mess; and his eyes, look you, traveled all over the world as if it had been a man's face. The next thing he did was to turn up in Italy; it was just as if he had put his head out of the window and the sight of him was enough; they gulp down the Austrians at Marengo like a whale swallowing gudgeons! O, ho! The French victories blew their trumpets so loud that the whole world could hear the noise, and there was an end of it.

" 'We will not keep on at this game any longer!' say the Germans.

" 'That is enough of this sort of thing,' say the others.

"Here is the upshot. Europe shows the white feather, England knuckles under, general peace all round, and kings and peoples pretending to embrace each other. While then and there the Emperor hits on the idea of the Legion of Honor, there's a fine thing if you like!

"He spoke to the whole army at Boulogne. 'In France,' so he said, 'every man is brave. So the civilian who does gloriously shall be the soldier's sister, the soldier shall be his brother, and both shall stand together beneath the flag of honor.'

"By the time that the rest of us who were away down there in Egypt had come back again, everything was changed. We



had seen him last as a general, and in no time we find that he is Emperor ! And when this was settled (and it may safely be said that every one was satisfied) there was a holy ceremony such as never was seen under the canopy of heaven. Faith, France gave herself to him, like a handsome girl to a lancer, and the Pope and all his cardinals in robes of red and gold come across the Alps on purpose to anoint him before the army and the people, who clap their hands.

“There is one thing that it would be very wrong to keep back from you. While he was in Egypt, in the desert not far away from Syria, the ‘Red Man’ had appeared to him on the mountain of Moses, in order to say, ‘Everything is going on well.’ Then again, on the eve of the victory at Marengo, the ‘Red Man’ springs to his feet in front of the Emperor for the second time, and says to him—

“‘You shall see the world at your feet ; you shall be Emperor of the French, King of Italy, master of Holland, ruler of Spain, Portugal and the Illyrian Provinces, protector of Germany, saviour of Poland, first eagle of the Legion of Honor, and all the rest of it.’

“That ‘Red Man,’ look you, was a notion of his own, who ran on errands and carried messages, so many people say, between him and his star. I myself have never believed that ; but the ‘Red Man’ is, undoubtedly, a fact. Napoleon himself spoke of the ‘Red Man’ who lived up in the roof of the Tuileries, and who used to come to him, he said, in moments of trouble and difficulty. So on the night after his coronation Napoleon saw him for the third time, and they talked over a lot of things together.

“Then the Emperor goes straight to Milan to have himself crowned King of Italy, and then came the real triumph of the soldier. For every one who could write became an officer forthwith, and pensions and gifts of duchies poured down in showers. There were fortunes for the staff that never cost France a penny, and the Legion of Honor was as good as an

annuity for the rank and file; I still draw my pension on the strength of it. In short, here were armies provided for in a way that had never been seen before! But the Emperor, who knew that he was to be Emperor over everybody, and not only over the army, bethinks himself of the bourgeois, and sets them to build fairy monuments in places that had been as bare as the back of my hand till then. Suppose, now, that you are coming out of Spain and on the way to Berlin; well, you would see triumphal arches, and in the sculpture upon them the common soldiers are done every bit as beautifully as the generals!

“In two or three years Napoleon fills his cellars with gold, makes bridges, palaces, roads, scholars, festivals, laws, fleets, and harbors; he spends millions on millions, ever so much, and ever so much more to it, so that I have heard it said that he could have paved the whole of France with five-franc pieces if the fancy had taken him; and all this without putting any taxes on you people here. So when he was comfortably seated on his throne, and so thoroughly the master of the situation that all Europe was waiting for leave to do anything for him that he might happen to want; as he had four brothers and three sisters, he said to us, just as it might be by way of conversation, in the order of the day—

“‘Children, is it fitting that your Emperor’s relations should beg their bread? No; I want them all to be luminaries, like me in fact! Therefore, it is urgently necessary to conquer a kingdom for each one of them, so that the French nation may be masters everywhere, so that the Guard may make the whole earth tremble, and France may spit wherever she likes, and every nation shall say to her, as it is written on my coins, “God protects you.”’

“‘All right!’ answers the army; ‘we will fish up kingdoms for you with the bayonet.’

“Ah! there was no backing out of it, look you! If he had taken it into his head to conquer the moon, we should

have had to put everything in train, pack our knapsacks, and scramble up; luckily, he had no wish for that excursion. The kings who were used to the comforts of a throne, of course, objected to be lugged off, so we had marching orders. We march, we get there, and the earth begins to shake to its centre again. What times they were for wearing out men and shoe-leather! And the hard knocks that they gave us! Only Frenchmen could have stood it. But you are not ignorant that a Frenchman is a born philosopher; he knows that he must die a little sooner or a little later. So we used to die without a word, because we had the pleasure of watching the Emperor do *this* on the maps."

Here the soldier swung quickly round on one foot, so as to trace a circle on the barn floor with the other.

" 'There, that shall be a kingdom,' he used to say, and it was a kingdom. What fine times they were! Colonels became generals whilst you were looking at them, generals became marshals of France, and marshals became kings. There is one of them still left on his feet to keep Europe in mind of those days, Gascon though he may be, and a traitor to France that he might keep his crown; and he did not blush for his shame, for, after all, a crown, look you, is made of gold. The very sappers and miners who knew how to read became great nobles in the same way. And I, who am telling you all this, have seen in Paris eleven kings and a crowd of princes all round about Napoleon, like rays about the sun! Keep this well in your minds, that as every soldier stood a chance of having a throne of his own (provided he showed himself worthy of it), a corporal of the Guard was by way of being a sight to see, and they gaped at him as he went by; for every one came by his share after a victory, it was made perfectly clear in the bulletin. And what battles they were! Austerlitz, where the army was manœuvred as if it had been a review; Eylau, where the Russians were drowned in a lake, just as if Napoleon had breathed on them and blown them in; Wagram, where the

fighting was kept up for three whole days without flinching. In short, there were as many battles as there are saints in the calendar.

“Then it was made quite clear beyond a doubt that Napoleon bore the sword of God in his scabbard. He had a regard for the soldier. He took the soldier for his child. He was anxious that you should have shoes, shirts, greatcoats, bread, and cartridges; but he kept up his majesty, too, for reigning was his own particular occupation. But, all the same, a sergeant, or even a common soldier, could go up to him and call him ‘Emperor,’ just as you might say ‘My good friend’ to me at times. And he would give an answer to anything you put before him. He used to sleep on the snow just like the rest of us—in short, he looked almost like an ordinary man; but I who am telling you all these things have seen him myself with the grapeshot whizzing about his ears, no more put out by it than you are at this moment; never moving a limb, watching through his field-glass, always looking after his business; so we stood our ground likewise, as cool and calm as John the Baptist. I do not know how he did it; but whenever he spoke, a something in his words made our hearts burn within us; and just to let him see that we were his children, and that it was not in us to shirk or flinch, we used to walk just as usual right up to the mouths of cannon that were belching forth smoke and vomiting battalions of balls, while never a man would so much as say, ‘Lookout!’ It was a something that made dying men raise their heads to salute him and cry, ‘Long live the Emperor!’

“Was that natural? Would you have done this for an ordinary man?

“Thereupon, having fitted up all his family, and things having so turned out that the Empress Josephine (a good woman for all that) had no children, he was obliged to part company with her, although he loved her not a little. But he must have children, for reasons of state. All the crowned

heads of Europe, when they heard of his difficulty, squabbled among themselves as to who should find him a wife. He married an Austrian princess, so they say, who was the daughter of the Cæsars, a man of antiquity whom everybody talks about, not only in our country, where it is said that most things were his doing, but also all over Europe. And so certain sure is that, that I who am talking to you have been myself across the Danube, where I saw the ruins of a bridge built by that man; and it appeared that he was some connection of Napoleon's at Rome, for the Emperor claimed succession there for his son.

"So, after his wedding, which was a holiday for the whole world, and when they relieved the people of their taxes for ten years to come (though they had to pay them just the same after all, because the excisemen took no notice of the proclamation)—after his wedding, I say, his wife had a child who was King of Rome: a child was born a king while his father was alive, a thing that had never been seen in the world before! That day a balloon set out from Paris to carry the news to Rome, and went all the way in one day. There, now! Is there one of you who will stand me out that there was nothing supernatural in that? No, it was decreed on high. And the mischief take those who will not allow that it was wafsted over by God himself, so as to add to the honor and glory of France!

"But there was the Emperor of Russia, a friend of our Emperor, who was put out because he had not married a Russian lady. So the Russian backs up our enemies, the English, for there had always been something to prevent Napoleon from putting a spoke in their wheel. Clearly an end must be made of fowl of that feather. Napoleon is vexed, and he says to us—

"Soldiers! You have been the masters of every capital in Europe, except Moscow, which is allied to England. So, in order to conquer London and India, which belong to

them in London, I find it absolutely necessary that we go to Moscow.'

"Thereupon the greatest army that ever wore gaiters, and left its footprints all over the globe, is brought together, and drawn up with such peculiar cleverness, that the Emperor passed a million of men in review, all in a single day.

"'Hourra!' cry the Russians, and there is all Russia assembled, a lot of brutes of Cossacks that you never can come up with! It was country against country, a general stramash; we had to look out for ourselves. 'It was all Asia against Europe,' as the 'Red Man' had said to Napoleon. 'All right,' Napoleon had answered, 'I shall be ready for them.'

"And there, in fact, were all the kings who came to lick Napoleon's hand. Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Poland, and Italy, all speaking us fair and going along with us; it was a fine thing! The eagles had never cooed before as they did on parade in those days, when they were reared above all the flags of all the nations of Europe. The Poles could not contain their joy because the Emperor had a notion of setting up their kingdom again; and ever since Poland and France have always been like brothers. In short, the army shouts, 'Russia shall be ours!'

"We cross the frontiers, the entire lot of us. We march and still further march, but never a Russian do we see. At last all our watchdogs are encamped at Borodino. That was where I received the 'Cross,' and there is no denying that it was a cursed battle. The Emperor was not easy in his mind; he had seen the 'Red Man,' who said to him, 'My child, you are going a little too fast for your feet; you will run short of men, and your friends will play you false.'

"Thereupon the Emperor proposes a treaty. But before he signs it, he says to us—

"'Let us give these Russians a drubbing!'

"'All right!' cried the army.



“ ‘Forward !’ say the sergeants.

“ My clothes were all falling to pieces, my shoes were worn out with trapezing over those roads out there, which are not good going at all. But it is all one. ‘Since here is the last of the row,’ said I to myself, ‘I mean to get all I can out of it.’

“ We were posted before the great ravine ; we had seats in the front row. The signal is given, and seven hundred guns begin a conversation fit to make the blood spirt from your ears. One should give the devil his due, and the Russians let themselves be cut in pieces just like Frenchmen ; they did not give way, and we made no advance.

“ ‘Forward !’ is the cry ; ‘here is the Emperor.’

“ So it was. He rides past us at a gallop, and makes a sign to us that a great deal depends on our carrying the redoubt. He puts fresh heart into us ; we rush forward, I am the first man to reach the gorge. Ah ! *mon Dieu !* how they fell, colonels, lieutenants, and common soldiers, all alike ! There were shoes to fit up those who had none, and epaulettes for the knowing fellows that knew how to write.—Victory is the cry all along the line ! And, upon my word, there were twenty-five thousand Frenchmen lying on the field. No more, I assure you ! Such a thing was never seen before ; it was just like a field when the corn is cut, with a man lying there for every ear of corn. That sobered the rest of us. The Emperor comes, and we make a circle round about him, and he coaxes us round (for he could be very nice when he chose), and persuades us to dine with Duke Humphrey, when we were as hungry as hunters. Then our consoler distributes the Crosses of the Legion of Honor himself, salutes the dead, and says to us, ‘On to Moscow !’

“ ‘To Moscow, so be it !’ says the army.

“ We take Moscow. What do the Russians do but set fire to their city ! There was a blaze, two leagues of bonfire that burned for two days ! The buildings fell about our ears like

slates, and molten lead and iron came down in showers ; it was really horrible ; it was a light to see our sorrows by, I can tell you ! The Emperor said, ‘ There, that is enough of this sort of thing ; all my men shall stay here.’

“ We amuse ourselves for a bit by recruiting and repairing our frames, for we really were much fatigued by the campaign. We take away with us a gold cross from the top of the Kremlin, and every soldier had a little fortune. But on the way back the winter came down on us a month earlier than usual, a matter which the learned (like a set of fools) have never sufficiently explained, and we are nipped with the cold. We were no longer an army after that, do you understand ? There was an end of generals and even of the sergeants ; hunger and misery took the command instead, and all of us were absolutely equal under their reign. All we thought of was how to get back to France ; no one stooped to pick up his gun or his money ; every one walked straight before him, and armed himself as he thought fit, and no one cared about glory.

“ The Emperor saw nothing of his star all this time, for the weather was so bad. There was some misunderstanding between him and heaven. Poor man ! how bad he felt when he saw his eagles flying with their backs turned on victory ! That was really too rough ! Well, the next thing is the Beresina. And here and now, my friends, any one can assure you on his honor, and by all that is sacred, that *never*, no, never since there have been men on earth, never in this world has there been seen an army in such a stew—caissons, transports, artillery and all—in such snow as that and under such a pitiless sky. It was so cold that you burned your hand on the barrel of your gun if you happened to touch it. There it was that the pontooneers saved the army, for the pontooneers stood firm at their posts ; it was there that Gondrin behaved like a hero, and he is the sole survivor of all the men who were dogged enough to stand in the river so as to build the

bridges on which the army crossed over, and so escaped the Russians, who still respected the Grand Army on account of its past victories. And Gondrin is an accomplished soldier," he went on, pointing to his friend, who was gazing at him with the rapt attention peculiar to deaf people, "a distinguished soldier who deserves to have your very highest esteem.

"I saw the Emperor standing by the bridge," he went on, "and never feeling the cold at all. Was that, again, a natural thing? He was looking on at the loss of his treasures, of his friends, and those who had fought with him in Egypt. Bah! there was an end of everything. Women and wagons and guns were all engulfed and swallowed up, everything went to wreck and ruin. A few of the bravest among us saved the eagles, for the eagles, look you, meant France, and all the rest of you; it was the civil and military honor of France that was in our keeping, there must be no spot on the honor of France, and the cold should never make her bow her head. There was no getting warm except in the neighborhood of the Emperor; for whenever he was in danger we hurried up, all frozen as we were—we who would not stop to hold out a hand to a fallen friend.

"They say, too, that he shed tears of a night over his poor family of soldiers. Only he and Frenchmen could have pulled themselves out of such a plight; but we did pull ourselves out, though, as I am telling you, it was with loss, ay, and heavy loss. The allies had eaten up all our provisions; everybody began to betray him, just as the 'Red Man' had foretold. The rattle-pates in Paris, who had kept quiet ever since the Imperial Guard had been established, think that *he* is dead, and hatch a conspiracy. They set to work in the Home Office to overturn the Emperor. These things come to his knowledge and worry him; he says to us at parting: 'Good-bye, children; keep to your posts, I will come back again.'

"Bah! Those generals of his lose their heads at once;

for when he was away, it was not like the same thing. The marshals fall out among themselves, and make blunders, as was only natural, for Napoleon in his kindness had fed them on gold till they had grown as fat as butter, and they had no mind to march. Troubles came of this, for many of them stayed inactive in garrison towns in the rear, without attempting to tickle up the backs of the enemy behind us, and we were being driven back on France. But Napoleon comes back among us with fresh troops; conscripts they were, and famous conscripts too; he had put some thorough notions of discipline into them—the whelps were good to set their teeth in anybody. He had a bourgeois guard of honor too, and fine troops they were! They melted away like butter on a gridiron. We may put a bold front on it, but everything is against us, although the army still performs prodigies of valor. Whole nations fought against nations in tremendous battles at Dresden, Lützen, and Bautzen, and then it was that France showed extraordinary heroism, for you must all of you bear in mind that in those times a stout grenadier only lasted six months.

“We always won the day, but the English were always on our track, putting nonsense into other nations’ heads, and stirring them up to revolt. In short, we cleared a way through all these mobs of nations; for wherever the Emperor appeared, we made a passage for him; for on the land as on the sea, whenever he said, ‘I wish to go forward,’ we made the way.

“There comes a final end to it at last. We are back in France; and in spite of the bitter weather, it did one’s heart good to breathe one’s native air again, it set up many a poor fellow; and as for me, it put new life into me, I can tell you. But it was a question all at once of defending France, our fair land of France. All Europe was up in arms against us; they took it in bad part that we had tried to keep the Russians in order by driving them back within their own borders, so that

they should not gobble us up, for those Northern folk have a strong liking for eating up the men of the South, it is a habit they have; I have heard the same thing of them from several generals.

“So the Emperor finds his own father-in-law, his friends whom he had made crowned kings, and the rabble of princes to whom he had given back their thrones were all against him. Even Frenchmen and allies in our own ranks turned against us, by orders from high quarters, as at Leipsic. Common soldiers would hardly be capable of such abominations; yet these princes, as they called themselves, broke their words three times a day! The next thing they do is to invade France. Whenever our Emperor shows his lion's face, the enemy beats a retreat; he worked more miracles for the defence of France than he had ever wrought in the conquest of Italy, the East, Spain, Europe, and Russia; he has a mind to bury every foreigner in French soil, to give them a respect for France, so he lets them come close up to Paris, so as to do for them at a single blow, and to rise to the highest height of genius in the biggest battle that ever was fought, a mother of battles! But the Parisians, wanting to save their trumpery skins and afraid for their two-penny shops, open their gates, and there is a beginning of the *ragusades*, and an end of all joy and happiness; they make a fool of the Empress, and fly the white flag out at the windows. The Emperor's closest friends among his generals forsake him at last and go over to the Bourbons, of whom no one had ever heard tell. Then he bids us farewell at Fontainebleau:

“‘Soldiers!’—(I can hear him yet, we were all crying just like children; the eagles and the flags had been lowered as if for a funeral. Ah! and it was a funeral, I can tell you; it was the funeral of the empire; those smart armies of his were nothing but skeletons now.) So he stood there on the flight of steps before his château, and he said—

“‘Children, we have been overcome by treachery, but we

shall meet again up above in the country of the brave. Protect my child, I leave him in your care. *Long live Napoleon II.!*

“He had thought of killing himself, so that no one should behold Napoleon after his defeat; like Jesus Christ, before the crucifixion, he thought himself forsaken by God and by his talisman, and so he took enough poison to kill a regiment, but it had no effect whatever upon him. Another marvel! he discovered that he was immortal; and feeling sure of his case, and knowing that he should be Emperor forever, he went to an island for a little while, so as to study the dispositions of those folk who did not fail to make blunder upon blunder. Whilst he was biding his time, the Chinese and the brutes out in Africa, the Moors and whatnot, awkward customers all of them, were so convinced that he was something more than mortal that they respected his flag, saying that God would be displeased if any one meddled with it. So he reigned over all the rest of the world, although the doors of his own France had been closed upon him.

“Then he goes on board the same nutshell of a skiff that he sailed in from Egypt, passes under the noses of the English vessels, and sets foot in France. France recognizes her Emperor, the cuckoo flits from steeple to steeple; France cries with one voice, ‘Long live the Emperor!’ The enthusiasm for that wonder of the ages was thoroughly genuine in these parts. Dauphiné behaved handsomely; and I was uncommonly pleased to learn that people here shed tears of joy on seeing his gray overcoat once more.

“It was on March 1st that Napoleon set out with two hundred men to conquer the kingdom of France and Navarre, which by March 20th had become the French Empire again. On that day he found himself in Paris, and a clean sweep had been made of everything; he had won back his beloved France, and had called all his soldiers about him again, and three words of his had done it all—‘Here am I!’ ’Twas

the greatest miracle God ever worked ! Was it ever known in the world before that a man should do nothing but show his hat, and a whole empire became his ? They fancied that France was crushed, did they ? Never a bit of it. A national army springs up again at the sight of the eagle, and we all march to Waterloo. There the Guard fall all as one man. Napoleon in his despair heads the rest, and flings himself three times on the enemy's guns without finding the death he sought ; we all saw him do it, we soldiers, and the day was lost ! That night the Emperor calls all his old soldiers about him, and there on the battlefield, which was soaked with our blood, he burns his flags and his eagles—the poor eagles that had never been defeated, that had cried ‘forward !’ in battle after battle, and had flown above us all over Europe. That was the end of the eagles—all the wealth of England could not purchase for her one tail-feather. The rest is sufficiently known.

“The ‘Red Man’ went over to the Bourbons like the low scoundrel he is. France is prostrate, the soldier counts for nothing, they rob him of his due, send him about his business, and fill his place with nobles who could not walk, they were so old, so that it made you sorry to see them. They seize Napoleon by treachery, the English shut him up on a desert island in the ocean, on a rock ten thousand feet above the rest of the world. That is the final end of it ; there he has to stop till the ‘Red Man’ gives him back his power again, for the happiness of France. A lot of them say that he is dead ! Dead ? Oh ! yes, very likely. They do not know him, that is plain ! They go on telling that fib to deceive the people, and to keep things quiet for their tumble-down government. Listen ; this is the whole truth of the matter. His friends have left him alone in the desert to fulfil a prophecy that was made about him, for I forgot to tell you that his name Napoleon means the *Lion of the Desert*. And that is gospel truth. You will hear plenty of other things said about the Emperor, but they are all monstrous non-

sense. Because, look you, to no man of woman born would God have given the power to write his name in red, as he did, across the earth, where he will be remembered for ever!—Long live ‘Napoleon, the father of the soldier, the father of the people!’”

“Long live General Eblé!” cried the pontooneer.

“How did you manage not to die in the gorge of the redoubts at Borodino?” asked a peasant woman.

“Do I know? We were a whole regiment when we went down into it, and only a hundred foot were left standing; only infantry could have carried it; for the infantry, look you, is everything in an army——”

“But how about the cavalry?” cried Genestas, slipping down out of the hay in a sudden fashion that drew a startled cry from the boldest.

“Hé, old boy! you are forgetting Poniatowski’s Red Lancers, the Cuirassiers, the Dragoons, and the whole boiling. Whenever Napoleon grew tired of seeing his battalions gain no ground towards the end of a victory, he would say to Murat, ‘Here, you! cut them in two for me!’ and we set out first at a trot, and then at a gallop, *one, two!* and cut a way clean through the ranks of the enemy; it was like slicing an apple in two with a knife. Why, a charge of cavalry is nothing more nor less than a column of cannon-balls.”

“And how about the pontooneers?” cried the deaf veteran.

“There, there! my children,” Genestas went on, repenting in his confusion of the sally he had made, when he found himself in the middle of a silent and bewildered group, “there are no agents of police spying here! Here, drink to the Little Corporal with this?”

“Long live the Emperor!” all cried with one voice.

“Hush! children,” said the officer, concealing his own deep sorrow with an effort. “Hush! *He is dead.* He died saying, ‘*Glory, France, and battle.*’ So it had to be, children, he must die; but his memory—never!”



Goguelat made an incredulous gesture; then he whispered to those about him, "The officer is still in the service, and orders have been issued that they are to tell the people that the Emperor is dead. You must not think any harm of him, because, after all, a soldier must obey orders."

As Genestas went out of the barn, he heard La Fosseuse say, "That officer, you know, is M. Benassis' friend, and a friend of the Emperor."

Every soul in the barn rushed to the door to see the commandant again; they saw him in the moonlight, as he took the doctor's arm.

"It was a stupid thing to do," said Genestas. "Quick! let us go into the house. Those eagles, cannon, and campaigns!—I had quite forgotten where I was."

"Well, what do you think of our Goguelat?" asked Benassis.

"So long as such stories are told in France, sir, she will always find the fourteen armies of the Republic within her, at need; and her cannon will be perfectly able to keep up a conversation with the rest of Europe. That is what I think."

A few moments later they reached Benassis' dwelling, and soon were sitting on either side of the hearth in the salon; the dying fire in the grate still sent up a few sparks now and then. Each was absorbed in thought. Genestas was hesitating to ask one last question. In spite of the marks of confidence that he had received, he feared lest the doctor should regard his inquiry as indiscreet. He looked searchingly at Benassis more than once; and an answering smile, full of a kindly cordiality, such as lights up the faces of men of real strength of character, seemed to give him in advance the favorable reply for which he sought. So he spoke—

"Your life, sir, is so different from the lives of ordinary men, that you will not be surprised to hear me ask you the reason of your retired existence. My curiosity may seem to you to be unmannerly, but you will admit that it is very

natural. Listen a moment: I have had comrades with whom I have never been on intimate terms, even though I have made many campaigns with them; but there have been others to whom I would say, 'Go to the paymaster and draw our money,' three days after we had got drunk together, a thing that will happen, for the quietest folk must have a frolic fit at times. Well, then, you are one of those people whom I take for a friend without waiting to ask leave, nay, without so much as knowing wherefore."

"Captain Bluteau——"

Whenever the doctor had called his guest by his assumed name, the latter had been unable for some time past to suppress a slight grimace. Benassis, happening to look up just then, caught this expression of repugnance; he sought to discover the reason of it, and looked full into the soldier's face, but the real enigma was wellnigh insoluble for him, so he set down these symptoms to physical suffering, and went on—

"Captain, I am about to speak of myself. I have had to force myself to do so already several times since yesterday, while telling you about the improvements that I have managed to introduce here; but it was a question of the interests of the people and the commune, with which mine are necessarily bound up. But, now, if I tell you my story, I should have to speak wholly of myself, and mine has not been a very interesting life."

"If it were as uneventful as La Fosseuse's life," answered Genestas, "I should still be glad to know about it; I should like to know the untoward events that could bring a man of your calibre into this canton."

"Captain, for these twelve years I have lived in silence; and now, as I wait at the brink of the grave for the stroke that shall cast me into it, I will candidly own to you that this silence is beginning to weigh heavily upon me. I have borne my sorrows alone for twelve years; I have had none of the comfort that friendship gives in such full measure to a heart in

pain. My poor sick folk and my peasants certainly set me an example of un murmuring resignation ; but they know that I at least understand them and their troubles, while there is not a soul here who knows of the tears that I have shed, no one to give me the hand-clasp of a comrade, the noblest reward of all, a reward that falls to the lot of every other, even Gondrin has not missed that."

Genestas held out his hand, a sudden impulsive movement by which Benassis was deeply touched.

"There is La Fosseuse," he went on in a different voice ; "she perhaps would have understood as the angels might ; but then, too, she might possibly have loved me, and that would have been a misfortune. Listen, captain, my confession could only be made to an old soldier who looks as leniently as you do on the failings of others, or to some young man who has not lost the illusions of youth ; for only a man who knows life well, or a lad to whom it is all unknown, could understand my story. The captains of past times who fell upon the field of battle used to make their last confession to the cross on the hilt of their sword ; if there was no priest at hand, it was the sword that received and kept the last confidences between a human soul and God. And will you hear and understand me, for you are one of Napoleon's finest sword-blades, as thoroughly tempered and as strong as steel ? Some parts of my story can only be understood by a delicate tenderness, and through a sympathy with the beliefs that dwell in simple hearts ; beliefs which would seem absurd to the sophisticated people who made use in their own lives of the prudential maxims of worldly wisdom that only apply to the government of states. To you I shall speak openly and without reserve, as a man who does not seek to apologize for his life with the good and evil done in the course of it ; as one who will hide nothing from you, because he lives so far from the world of to-day, careless of the judgments of man, and full of hope in God."

Benassis stopped, rose to his feet, and said, "Before I begin my story, I will order tea. Jacquotte has never missed asking me if I will take it for these twelve years past, and she will certainly interrupt us. Do you care about it, captain?"

"No, thank you."

In another moment Benassis returned.



#### IV.

### THE COUNTRY DOCTOR'S CONFESSION.

“I WAS born in a little town in Languedoc,” the doctor resumed. “My father had been settled there for many years, and there my early childhood was spent. When I was eight years old I was sent to the school of the Oratorians at Sorrèze, and only left it to finish my studies in Paris. My father had squandered his patrimony in the course of an exceedingly wild and extravagant youth. He had retrieved his position partly by a fortunate marriage, partly by the slow persistent thrift characteristic of provincial life; for in the provinces people pride themselves on accumulating rather than on spending, and all the ambition in a man’s nature is either extinguished or directed to money-getting, for want of any nobler end. So he had grown rich at last, and thought to transmit to his only son all the cut-and-dried experience which he himself had purchased at the price of his lost illusions; a noble last illusion of age which fondly seeks to bequeath its virtues and its wary prudence to heedless youth, intent only on the enjoyment of the enchanted life that lies before it.

“This foresight on my father’s part led him to make plans for my education for which I had to suffer. He sedulously concealed my expectations of wealth from me, and during the fairest years of my youth compelled me, for my own good, to endure the burden of anxiety and hardship that presses upon a young man who has his own way to make in the world. His idea in so doing was to instil the virtues of poverty into me—patience, a thirst for learning, and a love of work for its own sake. He hoped to teach me to set a proper value on my inheritance, by letting me learn, in this way, all that it costs to make a fortune; wherefore, as soon as I was old enough to

(202)

understand his advice, he urged me to choose a profession and to work steadily at it. My tastes inclined me to the study of medicine.

"So I left Sorrèze, after ten years of the almost monastic discipline of the Oratorians; and, fresh from the quiet life of a remote provincial school, I was taken straight to the capital. My father went with me in order to introduce me to the notice of a friend of his; and (all unknown to me) my two elders took the most elaborate precautions against any ebullitions of youth on my part, innocent lad though I was. My allowance was rigidly computed on a scale based upon the absolute necessities of life, and I was obliged to produce my certificate of attendance at the *École de Médecine* before I was allowed to draw my quarter's income. The excuse for this sufficiently humiliating distrust was the necessity of my acquiring methodical and business-like habits. My father, however, was not sparing of money for all the necessary expenses of my education and for the amusements of Parisian life.

"His old friend was delighted to have a young man to guide through the labyrinth into which I had entered. He was one of those men whose natures lead them to docket their thoughts, feelings, and opinions every whit as carefully as their papers. He would turn up last year's memorandum book, and could tell in a moment what he had been doing a twelvemonth since in this very month, day, and hour of the present year. Life, for him, was a business enterprise, and he kept the books after the most approved business methods. There was real worth in him though he might be punctilious, shrewd, and suspicious, and though he never lacked specious excuses for the precautionary measures that he took with regard to me. He used to buy all my books; he paid for my lessons; and once, when the fancy took me to learn to ride, the good soul himself found me out a riding-school, went thither with me, and anticipated my wishes by putting a horse

at my disposal whenever I had a holiday. In spite of all this cautious strategy, which I managed to defeat as soon as I had any temptation to do so, the kind old man was a second father to me.

“ ‘ My friend,’ he said, as soon as he surmised that I should break away altogether from my leading-strings, unless he relaxed them, ‘ young folk are apt to commit follies which draw down the wrath of their elders upon their heads, and you may happen to want money at some time or other ; if so, come to me. Your father helped me nobly once upon a time, and I shall always have a few crowns to spare for you ; but never tell me any lies, and do not be ashamed to own to your faults. I myself was young once ; we shall always get on well together, like two good comrades.’

“ My father found lodgings for me with some quiet, middle-class people in the Latin Quarter, and my room was furnished nicely enough ; but this first taste of independence, my father’s kindness, and the self-denial which he seemed to be exercising for me, brought me but little happiness. Perhaps the value of liberty cannot be known until it has been experienced ; and the memories of the freedom of my childhood had been almost effaced by the irksome and dreary life at school, from which my spirits had scarcely recovered. In addition to this, my father had urged new tasks upon me, so that altogether Paris was an enigma. You must acquire some knowledge of its pleasures before you can amuse yourself in Paris.

“ My real position, therefore, was quite unchanged, save that my new school was a much larger building, and was called the *École de Médecine*. Nevertheless, I studied away bravely at first ; I attended lectures diligently ; I worked desperately hard and without relaxation, so strongly was my imagination affected by the abundant treasures of knowledge to be gained in the capital. But very soon I heedlessly made acquaintances ; danger lurks hidden beneath the rash confiding friend-

ships that have so strong a charm for youth, and gradually I was drawn into the dissipated life of the capital. I became an enthusiastic lover of the theatre; and with my craze for actors and the play, the work of my demoralization began. The stage, in a great metropolis, exerts a very deadly influence over the young; they never quit the theatre save in a state of emotional excitement almost always beyond their power to control; society and the law seem to me to be accessories to the irregularities brought about in this way. Our legislation has shut its eyes, so to speak, to the passions that torment a young man between twenty and five-and-twenty years of age. In Paris he is assailed by temptations of every kind. Religion may preach and law may demand that he should walk uprightly, but all his surroundings and the tone of those about him are so many incitements to evil. Do not the best of men and the most devout women there look upon continence as ridiculous? The great city, in fact, seems to have set herself to give encouragement to vice and to this alone; for a young man finds that the entrance to every honorable career in which he might look for success is barred by hindrances even more numerous than the snares that are continually set for him, so that through his weaknesses he may be robbed of his money.

"For a long while I went every evening to some theatre, and little by little I fell into idle ways. I grew more and more slack over my work; even my most pressing tasks were apt to be put off till the morrow, and before very long there was an end of my search after knowledge for its own sake; I did nothing more than the work which was absolutely required to enable me to get through the examinations that must be passed before I could become a doctor. I attended the public lectures, but I no longer paid any attention to the professors, who, in my opinion, were a set of dotards. I had already broken my idols—I became a Parisian.

"To be brief, I led the aimless drifting life of a young



provincial thrown into the heart of a great city ; still retaining some good and true feeling, still clinging more or less to the observance of certain rules of conduct, still fighting in vain against the debasing influence of evil examples, though I offered a feeble, half-hearted resistance, for the enemy had accomplices within me. Yes, sir, my face is not misleading ; past storms have plainly left their traces there. Yet, since I had drunk so deeply of the pure fountain of religion in my early youth, I was haunted in the depths of my soul, through all my wanderings, by an ideal of moral perfection which could not fail one day to bring me back to God by the paths of weariness and remorse. Is not he who feels the pleasures of earth most keenly sure to be attracted, soon or late, by the fruits of heaven ?

“ At first I went through the experience, more or less vivid, that always comes with youth—the countless moments of exultation, the unnumbered transports of despair. Sometimes I took my vehement energy of feeling for resolute will, and overestimated my powers ; sometimes at the mere sight of some trifling obstacle with which I was about to come into collision, I was far more cast down than I ought to have been. Then I would devise vast plans, would dream of glory, and betake myself to work ; but a pleasure party would divert me from the noble projects based on so infirm a purpose. Vague recollections of these great abortive schemes of mine left a deceptive glow in my soul and fostered my belief in myself, without giving me the energy to produce. In my indolent self-sufficiency I was in a very fair way to become a fool, for what is a fool but a man who fails to justify the excellent opinion which he has formed of himself ? My energy was directed towards no definite aims ; I wished for the flowers of life without the toil of cultivating them. I had no idea of the obstacles, so I imagined that everything was easy ; luck, I thought, accounted for success in science and in business, and genius was charlatanism. I took it for

granted that I should be a great man, because there was the power of becoming one within me; so I discounted all my future glory, without giving a thought to the patience required for the conception of a great work, nor of the execution, in the course of which all the difficulties of the task appear.

"The sources of my amusements were soon exhausted. The charm of the theatre does not last very long; and, for a poor student, Paris shortly became an empty wilderness. They were dull and uninteresting people that I met with in the circle of the family with whom I lived; but these, and an old man who had now lost touch with the world, were all the society that I had.

"So, like every young man who takes a dislike to the career marked out for him, I rambled about the streets for whole days together; I strolled along the quays, through the museums and public gardens, making no attempt to arrive at a clear understanding of my position, and without a single definite idea in my head. The burden of unemployed energies is felt more at that age than at any other; there is such an abundance of vitality running to waste, so much activity without result. I had no idea of the power that a resolute will puts into the hands of a man in his youth; for when he has ideas and puts his whole heart and soul into the work of carrying them out, his strength is yet further increased by the undaunted courage of youthful convictions.

"Childhood in its simplicity knows nothing of the perils of life; youth sees both its vastness and its difficulties, and at the prospect the courage of youth sometimes flags. We are still serving our apprenticeship to life; we are new to the business, a kind of faintheartedness overpowers us, and leaves us in an almost dazed condition of mind. We feel that we are helpless aliens in a strange country. At all ages we shrink back involuntarily from the unknown. And a young man is very much like the soldier who will walk up to the cannon's

mouth, and is put to flight by a ghost. He hesitates among the maxims of the world. The rules of attack and of self-defence are alike unknown to him ; he can neither give nor take ; he is attracted by women, and stands in awe of them ; his very good qualities tell against him, he is all generosity and modesty, and completely innocent of mercenary designs. Pleasure and not interest is his object when he tells a lie ; and among many dubious courses, the conscience, with which as yet he has not juggled, points out to him the right way, which he is slow to take.

“There are men whose lives are destined to be shaped by the impulses of their hearts, rather than by any reasoning process that takes place in their heads, and such natures as these will remain for a long while in the position that I have described. This was my own case. I became the plaything of two contending impulses ; the desires of youth were always held in check by a fainthearted sentimentality. Life in Paris is a cruel ordeal for impressionable natures, the great inequalities of fortune or of position inflame their souls and stir up bitter feelings. In that world of magnificence and pettiness envy is more apt to be a dagger than a spur. You are bound either to fall a victim or to become a partisan in this incessant strife of ambitions, desires, and hatreds, in the midst of which you are placed ; and by slow degrees the picture of vice triumphant and virtue made ridiculous produces its effect on a young man, and he wavers ; life in Paris soon rubs the bloom from conscience, the infernal work of demoralization has begun, and is soon accomplished. The first of pleasures, that which at the outset comprehends all the others, is set about with such perils that it is impossible not to reflect upon the least actions which it provokes, impossible not to calculate all its consequences. These calculations lead to selfishness. If some poor student, carried away by an impassioned enthusiasm, is fain to rise above selfish considerations, the suspicious attitude of those about him makes him pause and doubt ; it is

so hard not to share their mistrust, so difficult not to be on his guard against his own generous thoughts. His heart is seared and contracted by this struggle, the current of life sets toward the brain, and the callousness of the Parisian is the result—the condition of things in which schemes for power and wealth are concealed by the most charming frivolity, and lurk beneath the sentimental transports that take the place of enthusiasm. The simplest-natured woman in Paris always keeps a clear head even in the intoxication of happiness.

“This atmosphere was bound to affect my opinions and my conduct. The errors that have poisoned my life would have lain lightly on many a conscience, but we in the south have a religious faith that leads us to believe in a future life, and in the truths set forth by the Catholic Church. These beliefs give depth and gravity to every feeling, and to remorse a terrible and lasting power.

“The army were the masters of society at the time when I was studying medicine. In order to shine in women’s eyes, one had to be a colonel at the very least. A poor student counted for absolutely nothing. Goaded by the strength of my desires, and finding no outlet for them; hampered at every step and in every wish by the want of money; looking on study and fame as too slow a means of arriving at the pleasures that tempted me; drawn one way by my inward scruples, and another by evil examples; meeting with every facility for low dissipation, and finding nothing but hindrances barring the way to good society, I passed my days in wretchedness, overwhelmed by a surging tumult of desires, and by indolence of the most deadly kind, utterly cast down at times, only to be as suddenly elated.

“The catastrophe which at length put an end to this crisis was commonplace enough. The thought of troubling the peace of a household has always been repugnant to me; and not only so, I could not dissemble my feelings, the instinct of sincerity was too strong in me; I should have found it a

physical impossibility to lead a life of glaring falsity. There is for me but little attraction in pleasures that must be snatched. I wish for full consciousness of my happiness. I led a life of solitude, for which there seemed to be no remedy ; for I shrank from openly vicious courses, and the many efforts that I made to enter society were all in vain. There I might have met with some woman who would have undertaken the task of teaching me the perils of every path, who would have formed my manners, counseled me without wounding my vanity, and introduced me everywhere where I was likely to make friends who would be useful to me in my future career. In my despair, an intrigue of the most dangerous kind would perhaps have had its attractions for me ; but even peril was out of my reach. My inexperience sent me back again to my solitude, where I dwelt face to face with my thwarted desires.

“At last I formed a connection, at first a secret one, with a girl, whom I persuaded, half against her will, to share my life. Her people were worthy folk, who had but small means. It was not very long before she left her simple sheltered life, and fearlessly intrusted me with a future that virtue would have made happy and fair ; thinking, no doubt, that my narrow income was the surest guarantee of my faithfulness to her. From that moment the tempest that had raged within me ceased, and happiness lulled my wild desires and ambitions to sleep. Such happiness is only possible for a young man who is ignorant of the world, who knows nothing as yet of its accepted codes nor of the strength of prejudice ; but while it lasts, his happiness is as all-absorbing as a child's. Is not first love like a return of childhood across the intervening years of anxiety and toil ?

“There are men who learn life at a glance, who see it for what it is at once, who learn experience from the mistakes of others, who apply the current maxims of worldly wisdom to their own case with signal success, and make unerring forecasts at all times. Wise in their generation are such cool

heads as these! But there is also a luckless race endowed with the impressionable, keenly-sensitive temperament of the poet; these are the natures that fall into error, and to this latter class I belonged. There was no great depth in the feeling that first drew me towards this poor girl; I followed my instinct rather than my heart when I sacrificed her to myself, and I found no lack of excellent reasons wherewith to persuade myself that there was no harm whatever in what I had done. And as for her—she was devotion itself, a noble soul with a clear, keen intelligence and a heart of gold. She never counseled me other than wisely. Her love put fresh heart into me from the first; she foretold a splendid future of success and fortune for me, and gently constrained me to take up my studies again by her belief in me. In these days there is scarcely a branch of science that has no bearing upon medicine; it is a difficult task to achieve distinction, but the reward is great, for in Paris fame always means fortune. The unselfish girl devoted herself to me, shared in every interest, even the slightest, of my life, and managed so carefully and wisely that we lived in comfort on my narrow income. I had more money to spare, now that there were two of us, than I had ever had while I lived by myself. Those were my happiest days. I worked with enthusiasm, I had a definite aim before me, I had found the encouragement I needed. Everything I did or thought I carried to her, who had not only found the way to gain my love, but above and beyond this had filled me with sincere respect for her by the modest discretion which she displayed in a position where discretion and modesty seemed wellnigh impossible. But one day was like another, sir; and it is only after our hearts have passed through all the storms appointed for us that we know the value of a monotonous happiness, and learn that life holds nothing more sweet for us than this: a calm happiness in which the fatigue of existence is felt no longer, and the inmost thoughts of either find response in the other's soul.

"My former dreams assailed me again. They were my own vehement longings for the pleasures of wealth that awoke, though it was in love's name that I now asked for them. In the evenings I grew abstracted and moody, rapt in imaginings of the pleasures I could enjoy if I were rich, and thoughtlessly gave expression to my desires in answer to a tender questioning voice. I must have drawn a painful sigh from her who had devoted herself to my happiness; for she, sweet soul, felt nothing more cruelly than the thought that I wished for something that she could not give me immediately. Oh! sir, a woman's devotion is sublime!"

There was a sharp distress in the doctor's exclamation which seemed prompted by some recollection of his own; he paused for a brief while, and Genestas respected his musings.

"Well, sir," Benassis resumed, "something happened which should have concluded the marriage thus begun; but instead of that it put an end to it, and was the cause of all my misfortunes. My father died and left me a large fortune. The necessary business arrangements demanded my presence in Languedoc for several months, and I went thither alone. At last I had regained my freedom! Even the mildest yoke is galling to youth; we do not see its necessity any more than we see the need to work, until we have had some experience of life. I came and went without giving an account of my actions to any one; there was no need to do so now unless I wished, and I relished liberty with all the keen capacity for enjoyment that we have in Languedoc. I did not absolutely forget the ties that bound me; but I was so absorbed in other matters of interest that my mind was distracted from them, and little by little the recollection of them faded away. Letters full of heartfelt tenderness reached me; but at two-and-twenty a young man imagines that all women are alike tender; he does not know love from a passing infatuation; all things are confused in the sensations of pleasure which seem at first to comprise everything. It was only later, when

I came to a clearer knowledge of men and of things as they are, that I could estimate those noble letters at their just worth. No trace of selfishness was mingled with the feeling expressed in them; there was nothing but gladness on my account for my change of fortune, and regret on her own; it never occurred to her that I could change towards her, for she felt that she herself was incapable of change. But even then I had given myself up to ambitious dreams; I thought of drinking deeply of all the delights that wealth could give, of becoming a person of consequence, of making a brilliant marriage. So I read the letters, and contented myself with saying, 'She is very fond of me,' with the indifference of a coxcomb. Even then I was perplexed as to how to extricate myself from this entanglement; I was ashamed of it, and this fact as well as my perplexity led me to be cruel. We begin by wounding the victim, and then we kill it, that the sight of our cruelty may no longer put us to the blush. Late reflections upon those days of error have unveiled for me many a dark depth in the human heart. Yes, believe me, those who best have fathomed the good and evil in human nature have honestly examined themselves in the first instance. Conscience is the starting-point of our investigations; we proceed from ourselves to others, never from others to ourselves.

"When I returned to Paris I took up my abode in a large house which, in pursuance with my orders, had been taken for me, and the one person interested in my return and change of address was not informed of it. I wished to cut a figure among young men of fashion. I waited a few days to taste the first delights of wealth; and when, flushed with the excitement of my new position, I felt that I could trust myself to do so, I went to see the poor girl whom I meant to cast off. With a woman's quickness she saw what was passing in my mind, and hid her tears from me. She could not but have despised me; but it was her nature to be gentle and



kind, and she never showed her scorn. Her forbearance was a cruel punishment. An unresisting victim is not a pleasant thing ; whether the murder is done decorously in the drawing-room, or brutally on the highway, there should be a struggle to give some plausible excuse for taking a life. I renewed my visits very affectionately at first, making efforts to be gracious, if not tender ; by slow degrees I became politely civil ; and one day, by a sort of tacit agreement between us, she allowed me to treat her as a stranger, and I thought that I had done all that could be expected of me. Nevertheless I abandoned myself to my new life with almost frenzied eagerness, and sought to drown in gaiety any vague lingering remorse that I felt. A man who has lost his self-respect cannot endure his own society, so I led the dissipated life that wealthy young men lead in Paris. Owing to a good education and an excellent memory, I seemed cleverer than I really was, forthwith I looked down upon other people ; and those who, for their own purposes, wished to prove to me that I was possessed of extraordinary abilities, found me quite convinced on that head. Praise is the most insidious of all methods of treachery known to the world ; and this is nowhere better understood than in Paris, where intriguing schemers know how to stifle every kind of talent at its birth by heaping laurels on its cradle. So I did nothing worthy of my reputation ; I reaped no advantages from the golden opinions entertained of me, and made no acquaintances likely to be useful in my future career. I wasted my energies in numberless frivolous pursuits, and in the short-lived love intrigues that are the disgrace of salons in Paris, where every one seeks for love, grows blasé in the pursuit, falls into the libertinism sanctioned by polite society, and ends by feeling as much astonished at real passion as the world is over a heroic action. I did as others did. Often I dealt to generous and candid souls the deadly wound from which I myself was slowly perishing. Yet though deceptive appearances might lead others to misjudge me, I could

never overcome my scrupulous delicacy. Many times I had been duped, and should have blushed for myself had it been otherwise; I secretly prided myself on acting in good faith, although this lowered me in the eyes of others. As a matter of fact, the world has a considerable respect for cleverness, whatever form it takes, and success justifies everything. So the world was pleased to attribute to me all the good qualities and evil propensities, all the victories and defeats which had never been mine; credited me with conquest of which I knew nothing, and sat in judgment upon actions of which I had never been guilty. I scorned to contradict the slanders, and self-love led me to regard the more flattering rumors with a certain complacency. Outwardly my existence was pleasant enough, but in reality I was miserable. If it had not been for the tempest of misfortunes that very soon burst over my head, all good impulses must have perished, and evil would have triumphed in the struggle that went on within me; enervating self-indulgence would have destroyed the body, as the detestable habits of egotism exhausted the springs of the soul. But I was ruined financially. This was how it came about.

"No matter how large his fortune may be, a man is sure to find some one else in Paris possessed of yet greater wealth, whom he must needs aim at surpassing. In this unequal contest I was vanquished at the end of four years; and, like many another harebrained youngster, I was obliged to sell part of my property and to mortgage the remainder to satisfy my creditors. Then a terrible blow suddenly struck me down.

"Two years had passed since I had last seen the woman whom I had deserted. The turn that my affairs were taking would no doubt have brought me back to her once more; but one evening, in the midst of a gay circle of acquaintances, I received a note written in a trembling hand. It only contained these few words:

"'I have only a very little while to live, and I should like to see you, my friend, so that I may know what will become

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of my child—whether henceforward he will be yours ; and also to soften the regret that some day you might perhaps feel for my death.'

"The letter made me shudder. It was a revelation of secret anguish in the past, while it contained a whole unknown future. I set out on foot, I would not wait for my carriage ; I went across Paris, goaded by remorse, and gnawed by a dreadful fear that was confirmed by the first sight of my victim. In the extreme neatness and cleanliness beneath which she had striven to hide her poverty I read all the terrible sufferings of her life ; she was nobly reticent about them in her effort to spare my feelings, and only alluded to them after I had solemnly promised to adopt our child. She died, sir, in spite of all the care lavished upon her, and all that science could suggest was done for her in vain. The care and devotion that had come too late only served to render her last moments less bitter.

"To support her little one she had worked incessantly with her needle. Love for her child had given her strength to endure her life of hardship ; but it had not enabled her to bear my desertion, the keenest of all her griefs. Many times she had thought of trying to see me, but her woman's pride had always prevented this. While I squandered floods of gold upon my caprices, no memory of the past had ever bidden a single drop to fall in her home to help mother and child to live ; but she had been content to weep, and had not cursed me ; she had looked upon her evil fortune as the natural punishment of her error. With the aid of a good priest of Saint Sulpice, whose kindly voice had restored peace to her soul, she had sought for hope in the shadow of the altar, whither she had gone to dry her tears. The bitter flood that I had poured into her heart gradually abated ; and one day, when she heard her child say ' Father,' a word that she had not taught him, she forgave my crime. But sorrow and weeping and days and nights of ceaseless toil injured her health.

Religion had brought its consolations and the courage to bear the ills of life, but all too late. She fell ill of a heart complaint brought on by grief and by the strain of expectation, for she always thought that I should return, and her hopes always sprang up afresh after every disappointment. Her health grew worse ; and at last, as she was lying on her deathbed, she wrote those few lines, containing no word of reproach, prompted by religion, and by a belief in the goodness of my nature. She knew, she said, that I was blinded rather than bent on doing wrong. She even accused herself of carrying her womanly pride too far. 'If I had only written sooner,' she said, 'perhaps there might have been time for a marriage which would have legitimated our child.'

"It was only on her child's account that she wished for the solemnization of the ties that bound us, nor would she have sought for this if she had not felt that death was at hand to unloose them. But it was too late ; even then she had only a few hours to live. By her bedside, where I had learned to know the worth of a devoted heart, my nature underwent a final change. I was still at an age when tears are shed. During those last days, while the precious life yet lingered, my tears, my words, and everything I did bore witness to my heartstricken repentance. The meanness and pettiness of the society in which I had moved, the emptiness and selfishness of women of fashion had taught me to wish for and to seek an elect soul, and now I had found it—too late. I was weary of lying words and of masked faces ; counterfeit passion had set me dreaming ; I had called on love ; and now I beheld love lying before me, slain by my own hands, and had no power to keep it beside me, no power to keep what was so wholly mine.

"The experience of four years had taught me to know my own real character. My temperament, the nature of my imagination, my religious principles, which had not been eradicated, but had rather lain dormant ; my turn of mind, my

heart that only now began to make itself felt—everything within me led me to resolve to fill my life with the pleasures of affection, to replace a lawless love by family happiness—the truest happiness on earth. Visions of close and dear companionship appealed to me but the more strongly for my wanderings in the wilderness, my grasping at pleasures unenobled by thought or feeling. So though the revolution within me was rapidly effected, it was permanent. With my southern temperament, warped by the life I led in Paris, I should certainly have come to look without pity on an unhappy girl betrayed by her lover; I should have laughed at the story if it had been told me by some wag in merry company (for with us in France a clever *bon mot* dispels all feeling of horror at a crime), but all sophistries were silenced in the presence of this angelic creature, against whom I could bring not the least word of reproach. There stood her coffin, and my child, who did not know that I had murdered his mother, smiled at me.

“She died. She died happy when she saw that I loved her, and that this new love was due neither to pity nor to the ties that bound us together. Never shall I forget her last hours. Love had been won back, her mind was at rest about her child, and happiness triumphed over suffering. The comfort and luxury about her, the merriment of her child, who looked prettier still in the dainty garb that had replaced his baby-clothes, were pledges of a happy future for the little one, in whom she saw her own life renewed.

“The curate of Saint Sulpice witnessed my terrible distress. His words wellnigh made me despair. He did not attempt to offer conventional consolation, and put the gravity of my responsibilities unsparingly before me, but I had no need of a spur. The conscience within me spoke loudly enough already. A woman had placed a generous confidence in me. I had lied to her from the first; I had told her that I loved her, and then I had cast her off; I had brought all this sorrow upon an un-

happy girl who had braved the opinion of the world for me, and who therefore should have been sacred in my eyes. She had died forgiving me. Her implicit trust in the word of a man who had once before broken his promise to her effaced the memory of all her pain and grief, and she slept in peace. Agatha, who had given me her girlish faith, had found in her heart another faith to give me—the faith of a mother. Oh! sir, the child, *her* child! God alone can know all that he was to me! The dear little one was like his mother; he had her winning grace in his little ways, his talk and ideas; but for me, my child was not only a child, but something more; was he not the token of my forgiveness, my honor?

“He should have more than a father’s affection. He should be loved as his mother would have loved him. My remorse might change to happiness if I could only make him feel that his mother’s arms were still about him. I clung to him with all the force of human love and the hope of heaven, with all the tenderness in my heart that God has given to mothers. The sound of the child’s voice made me tremble. I used to watch him while he slept with a sense of gladness that was always new, albeit a tear sometimes fell on his forehead; I taught him to come to say his prayer upon my bed as soon as he awoke. How sweet and touching were the simple words of the *Pater-noster* in the innocent childish mouth! Ah! and at times how terrible! ‘*Our Father which art in heaven,*’ he began one morning; then he paused—‘Why is it not *our mother?*’ he asked, and my heart sank at his words.

“From the very first I had sown the seeds of future misfortune in the life of the son whom I idolized. Although the law has almost countenanced errors of youth by conceding to tardy regret a legal status to natural children, the insurmountable prejudices of society bring a strong force to the support of the reluctance of the law. All serious reflection on my part as to the foundations and mechanism of society, on the duties of man, and vital questions of morality date from this

period of my life. Genius comprehends at first sight the connection between a man's principles and the fate of the society of which he forms a part ; devout souls are inspired by religion with the sentiments necessary for their happiness ; but vehement and impulsive natures can only be schooled by repentance. With repentance came new light for me ; and I, who only lived for my child, came through that child to think over great social questions.

"I determined from the first that he should have all possible means of success within himself, and that he should be thoroughly prepared to take the high position for which I destined him. He learned English, German, Italian, and Spanish in succession ; and, that he might speak these languages correctly, tutors belonging to each of these various nationalities were successively placed about him from his earliest childhood. His aptitude delighted me. I took advantage of it to give him lessons in the guise of play. I wished to keep his mind free from fallacies, and strove before all things to accustom him from childhood to exert his intellectual powers, to make a rapid and accurate general survey of a matter, and then, by a careful study of every minor particular, to master his subject in detail. Lastly, I taught him to submit to discipline without murmuring. I never allowed an impure or improper word to be spoken in his hearing. I was careful that all his surroundings, and the men with whom he came in contact, should conduce to one end—to ennoble his nature, to set lofty ideals before him, to give him a love of truth and a horror of lies, to make him simple and natural in manner, as in word and deed. His natural aptitude had made his other studies easy to him, and his imagination made him quick to grasp these lessons that lay outside the province of the school-room. What a fair flower to tend ! How great are the joys that mothers know ! In those days I began to understand how his own mother had been able to live and to bear her sorrow. This, sir, was the great event of my

life; and now I am coming to the tragedy which drove me hither.

"It is the most ordinary commonplace story imaginable; but to me it meant the most terrible pain. For some years I had thought of nothing but my child, and how to make a man of him; then when my son was growing up and about to leave me, I grew afraid of my loneliness. Love was a necessity of my existence; this need for affection had never been satisfied, and only grew stronger with years. I was in every way capable of a real attachment; I had been tried and proved. I knew all that a steadfast love means, the love that delights to find a pleasure in self-sacrifice; in everything I did my first thought would always be for the woman I loved. In imagination I was fain to dwell on the serene heights far above doubt and uncertainty, where love so fills two beings that happiness flows quietly and evenly into their life, their looks, and words. Such love is to a life what religion is to the soul; a vital force, a power that enlightens and upholds. I understood the love of husband and wife in nowise as most people do; for me its full beauty and magnificence began precisely at the point where love perishes in many a household. I deeply felt the moral grandeur of a life so closely shared by two souls that the trivialities of every-day existence should be powerless against such lasting love as theirs. But where will the hearts be found whose beats are so nearly *isochronous* (let the scientific term pass) that they may attain to this beatific union? If they exist, nature and chance have set them far apart, so that they cannot come together; they find each other too late, or death comes too soon to separate them. There must be some good reasons for these dispensations of fate, but I have never sought to discover them. I cannot make a study of my wound, because I suffer too much from it. Perhaps perfect happiness is a monster which our species should not perpetuate. There were other causes for my fervent desire for such a marriage as this. I had no friends, the



world for me was a desert. There is something in me that repels friendship. More than one person has sought me out, but, in spite of efforts on my part, it came to nothing. With many men I have been careful to show no sign of something that is called 'superiority ;' I have adapted my mind to theirs ; I have placed myself at their point of view, joined in their laughter, and overlooked their defects ; any fame I might have gained, I would have bartered for a little kindly affection. They parted from me without regret. If you seek for real feeling in Paris, snares await you everywhere, and the end is sorrow. Wherever I set my foot, the ground round about me seemed to burn. My readiness to acquiesce was considered weakness ; though if I unsheathed my talons, like a man conscious that he may some day wield the thunderbolts of power, I was thought ill-natured ; to others, the delightful laughter that ceases with youth, and in which in later years we are almost ashamed to indulge, seemed absurd, and they amused themselves at my expense. People may be bored nowadays, but none the less they expect you to treat every trivial topic with befitting seriousness.

✓ "A hateful era ! You must bow down before mediocrity, frigidly polite mediocrity which you despise—and obey. On more mature reflection, I have discovered the reasons of these glaring inconsistencies. Mediocrity is never out of fashion, it is the daily wear of society ; genius and eccentricity are ornaments that are locked away and only brought out on certain days. Everything that ventures forth beyond the protection of the grateful shadow of mediocrity has something startling about it.

"So, in the midst of Paris, I led a solitary life. I had given up everything to society, but it had given me nothing in return ; and my child was not enough to satisfy my heart, because I was not a woman. My life seemed to be growing cold within me ; I was bending under a load of secret misery when I met the woman who was to make me know the might

of love, the reverence of an acknowledged love, love with its teeming hopes of happiness—in one word—love.

“I had renewed my acquaintance with that old friend of my father's who had once taken charge of my affairs. It was in his house that I first met her whom I must love as long as life shall last. The longer we live, sir, the more clearly we see the enormous influence of ideas upon the events of life. Prejudices, worthy of all respect, and bred by noble religious ideas, occasioned my misfortunes. This young girl belonged to an exceedingly devout family, whose views of Catholicism were due to the spirit of a sect improperly styled Jansenists, which, in former times, caused troubles in France. You know why?”

“No,” said Genestas.

“Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, once wrote a book which was believed to contain propositions at variance with the doctrines of the Holy See. When examined at a later date, there appeared to be nothing heretical in the wording of the text; some authors even went so far as to deny that the heretical propositions had any real existence. However it was, these insignificant disputes gave rise to two parties in the Gallican Church—the Jansenists and the Jesuits. Great men were found in either camp, and a struggle began between two powerful bodies. The Jansenists affected an excessive purity of morals and of doctrine, and accused the Jesuits of preaching a relaxed morality. The Jansenists, in fact, were Catholic Puritans, if two contradictory terms can be combined. During the Revolution, the Concordat occasioned an unimportant schism, a little segregation of ultra-catholics who refused to recognize the Bishops appointed by the authorities with the consent of the Pope. This little body of the faithful was called the Little Church; and those within its fold, like the Jansenists, led the strictly ordered lives that appear to be a first necessity of existence in all proscribed and persecuted sects. Many Jansenist families had joined the Little Church.

The family to which this young girl belonged had embraced the equally rigid doctrines of both these Puritanisms, tenets which impart a stern dignity to the character and mien of those who hold them. It is the nature of positive doctrine to exaggerate the importance of the most ordinary actions of life by connecting them with ideas of a future existence. This is the source of a splendid and delicate purity of heart, a respect for others and for self, of an indescribably keen sense of right and wrong, a wide charity, together with a justice so stern that it might well be called inexorable, and, lastly, a perfect hatred of lies and of all the vices comprised by falsehood.

"I can recall no more delightful moments than those of our first meeting at my old friend's house. I beheld for the first time this shy young girl with her sincere nature, her habits of ready obedience. All the virtues peculiar to the sect to which she belonged shone in her, but she seemed to be unconscious of her merit. There was a grace, which no austerity could diminish, about every movement of her lissome, slender form; her quiet brow, the delicate grave outlines of her face, and her clearly-cut features indicated noble birth; her expression was gentle and proud; her thick hair had been simply braided, the coronet of plaits about her head served, all unknown to her, as an adornment. Captain, she was for me the ideal type that is always made real for us in the woman with whom we fall in love; for when we love, is it not because we recognize beauty that we have dreamed of, the beauty that has existed in idea for us is realized? When I spoke to her, she answered simply, without shyness or eagerness; she did not know what a pleasure it was to me to see her, to hear the musical sounds of her voice. All these angels are revealed to our hearts by the same signs; by the sweetness of their tones, the tenderness in their eyes, by their fair, pale faces, and their gracious ways. All these things are so blended and mingled that we feel the charm of their presence, yet cannot tell in what that charm consists, and every movement is an expression

of a divine soul within. I loved passionately. This newly-awakened love satisfied all my restless longings, all my ambitious dreams. She was beautiful, wealthy, and nobly born; she had been carefully brought up; she had all the qualifications which the world positively demands of a woman placed in the high position which I desired to reach; she had been well educated, she expressed herself with a sprightly facility at once rare and common in France; where the most prettily-worded phrases of many women are emptiness itself, while her bright talk was full of sense. Above all, she had a deep consciousness of her own dignity which made others respect her; I know of no more excellent thing in a wife. I must stop, captain; no one can describe the woman he loves save very imperfectly, pre-existent mysteries which defy analysis lie between them.

"I very soon took my old friend into my confidence. He introduced me to her family, and gave me the countenance of his honorable character. I was received at first with the frigid politeness characteristic of those exclusive people who never forsake those whom they have once admitted to their friendship. As time went on they welcomed me almost as one of the family; this mark of their esteem was won by my behavior in the matter. In spite of my passionate love, I did nothing that could lower me in my own eyes; I did not cringe, I paid no court to those upon whom my fate depended, before all things I showed myself a man, and not other than I really was. When I was well known to them, my old friend, who was as desirous as I myself that my life of melancholy loneliness should come to an end, spoke of my hopes and met with a favorable reception; but with the diplomatic shrewdness which is almost a second nature with men of the world, he was silent with regard to an error of my youth, as he termed it. He was anxious to bring about a 'satisfactory marriage' for me, an expression that makes of so solemn an act a business transaction in which husband and wife endeavor to cheat each

other. In his opinion, the existence of my child would excite a moral repugnance, in comparison with which the question of money would be as nought, and the whole affair would be broken off at once, and he was right.

“‘It is a matter which will be very easily settled between you and your wife ; it will be easy to obtain her full and free forgiveness,’ he said.

“In short, he tried to silence my scruples, and all the insidious arguments that worldly wisdom could suggest were brought to bear upon me to this end. I will confess to you, sir, that, in spite of my promise, my first impulse was to act straightforwardly and to make everything known to the head of the family, but the thought of his uncompromising sternness made me pause, and the probable consequences of the confession appalled me ; my courage failed, I temporized with my conscience, I determined to wait until I was sufficiently sure of the affection of the girl I hoped to win before hazarding my happiness by the terrible confession. My resolution to acknowledge everything openly, at a convenient season, vindicated the sophistries of worldly wisdom and the sagacity of my old friend. So the young girl's parents received me as their future son-in-law without, as yet, taking their friends into their confidence.

“An infinite discretion is the distinguishing quality of pious families ; they are reticent about everything, even about matters of no importance. You would not believe, sir, how this sedate gravity and reserve, pervading every minor action, deepens the current of feeling and thought. Everything in that house was done with some useful end in view ; the women spent their leisure time in making garments for the poor ; their conversation was never frivolous ; laughter was not banished, but there was a kindly simplicity about their merriment. Their talk had none of the piquancy which scandal and ill-natured gossip give to the conversation of society ; only the father and uncle read the newspapers, even the most

harmless journal contains references to crimes or to public evils, and she whom I hoped to win had never cast her eyes over their sheets. How strange it was, at first, to listen to these orthodox people! But in a little while, the pure atmosphere left the same impression upon the soul that subdued colors give to the eyes, a sense of serene repose and of tranquil peace.

"To a superficial observer, their life would have seemed terribly monotonous. There was something chilling about the appearance of the interior of the house. Day after day I used to see everything, even the furniture in constant use, always standing in the same place, and this uniform tidiness pervaded the smallest details. Yet there was something very attractive about their household ways. I had been used to the pleasures of variety, to the luxury and stir of life in Paris; it was only when I had overcome my first repugnance that I saw the advantages of this existence; how it lent itself to continuity of thought and to involuntary meditation; how a life in which the heart has undisturbed sway seems to widen and grow vast as the sea. It is like the life of the cloister, where the outward surroundings never vary, and thought is thus compelled to detach itself from outward things and to turn to the infinite that lies within the soul!

"For a man as sincerely in love as I was, the silence and simplicity of the life, the almost conventual regularity with which the same things were done daily at the same hours, only deepened and strengthened love. In that profound calm the interest attaching to the least action, word, or gesture became immense. I learned to know that, in the interchange of glances and in answering smiles, there lies an eloquence and a variety of language far beyond the possibilities of the most magnificent of spoken phrases; that when the expression of the feelings is spontaneous and unforced, there is no idea, no joy nor sorrow that cannot thus be communicated by hearts that understand each other. How many times I have tried to

set forth my soul in my eyes or on my lips, compelled at once to speak and to be silent concerning my passion ; for the young girl, who, in my presence, was always serene and unconscious, had not been informed of the reason of my constant visits ; her parents were determined that the most important decision of her life should rest entirely with her. But does not the presence of our beloved satisfy the utmost desire of passionate love ? In that presence do we not know the happiness of the Christian who stands before God ? If for me more than for any other it was torture to have no right to give expression to the impulses of my heart, to force back into its depths the burning words that treacherously wrong the yet more ardent emotions which strive to find an utterance in speech ; I found, nevertheless, in the merest trifles a channel through which my passionate love poured itself forth but the more vehemently for this constraint, till every minor occurrence came to have an excessive importance.

“ I beheld her, not for brief moments, but for whole hours. There were pauses between my question and her answer, and long musings, when, with the tones of her voice lingering in my ears, I sought to divine from them the secret of her inmost thoughts ; perhaps her fingers would tremble as I gave her some object of which she had been in search, or I would devise pretexts to lightly touch her dress or her hair, to take her hand in mine, to compel her to speak more than she wished ; all these nothings were great events for me. Eyes and voice and gestures were freighted with mysterious messages of love in hours of ecstasy like these, and this was the only language permitted me by the quiet maidenly reserve of the young girl before me. Her manner towards me underwent no change ; with me she was always as a sister with a brother ; yet, as my passion grew, and the contrast between her glances and mine, her words and my utterances, became more striking, I felt at last that this timid silence was the only means by which she could express her feelings. Was she not always in the salon

whenever I came? Did she not stay there until my visit, expected and perhaps foreseen, was over? Did not this mute tryst betray the secret of her innocent soul? Nay, whilst I spoke, did she not listen with a pleasure which she could not hide?

"At last, no doubt, her parents grew impatient with this artless behavior and sober love-making. I was almost as timid as their daughter, and perhaps on this account found favor in their eyes. They regarded me as a man worthy of their esteem. My old friend was taken into their confidence; both father and mother spoke of me in the most flattering terms; I had become their adopted son, and more especially they singled out my moral principles for praise. In truth I had found my youth again; among these pure and religious surroundings early beliefs and early faith came back to the man of thirty-two.

"The summer was drawing to a close. Affairs of some importance had detained the family in Paris longer than their wont; but when September came, and they were able to leave town at last for an estate in Auvergne, her father entreated me to spend a couple of months with them in an old château hidden away among the mountains of the Cantal. I paused before accepting this friendly invitation. My hesitation brought me the sweetest and most delightful unconscious confession, a revelation of the mysteries of a girlish heart. Evelina—*Dieu!*" exclaimed Benassis; and he said no more for a time, wrapped in his own thoughts.

"Pardon me, Captain Bluteau," he resumed, after a long pause. "For twelve years I have not uttered the name that is always hovering in my thoughts, that a voice calls in my hearing even when I sleep. Evelina (since I have named her) raised her head with a strange quickness and abruptness, for about all her movements there was an instinctive grace and gentleness, and looked at me. There was no pride in her face, but rather a wistful anxiety. Then her color rose, and



her eyelids fell ; it gave me an indescribable pleasure never felt before that they should fall so slowly ; I could only stammer out my reply in a faltering voice. The emotion of my own heart made swift answer to hers. She thanked me by a happy look, and I almost thought that there were tears in her eyes. In that moment we had told each other everything. So I went into the country with her family. Since the day when our hearts had understood each other, nothing seemed to be as it had been before ; everything about us had acquired a fresh significance.

“ Love, indeed, is always the same, though our imagination determines the shape that love must assume ; like and unlike, therefore, is love in every soul in which he dwells, and passion becomes a unique work in which the soul expresses its sympathies. In the old trite saying that love is a projection of self—a two in one—lies a profound meaning known only to philosopher and poet ; for it is ourself in truth that we love in that other. Yet, though love manifests itself in such different ways that no pair of lovers since the world began is like any other pair before or since, they all express themselves after the same fashion, and the same words are on the lips of every girl, even of the most innocent, convent-bred maiden—the only difference lies in the degree of imaginative charm in their ideas. But between Evelina and other girls there was this difference, that where another would have poured out her feelings quite naturally, Evelina regarded these innocent confidences as a concession made to the stormy emotions which had invaded the quiet sanctuary of her girlish soul. The constant struggle between her heart and her principles gave to the least event of her life, so peaceful in appearance, in reality so profoundly agitated, a character of force very superior to the exaggerations of young girls whose manners are early rendered false by the world about them. All through the journey Evelina discovered beauty in the scenery through which we passed, and spoke of it with admiration. When we think

that we may not give expression to the happiness which is given to us by the presence of one we love, we pour out the secret gladness that overflows our hearts upon inanimate things, investing them with beauty in our happiness. The charm of the scenery which passed before our eyes became in this way an interpreter between us, for in our praises of the landscape we revealed to each other the secrets of our love. Evelina's mother sometimes took a mischievous pleasure in disconcerting her daughter.

"My dear child, you have been through this valley a score of times without seeming to admire it !' she remarked after a somewhat too enthusiastic phrase from Evelina.

"No doubt it was because I was not old enough to understand beauty of this kind, mother.'

"Forgive me for dwelling on this trifle, which can have no charm for you, captain ; but the simple words brought me an indescribable joy, which had its source in the glance directed towards me as she spoke. So some village lighted by the sunrise, some ivy-covered ruin which we had seen together, memories of outward and visible things, served to deepen and strengthen the impressions of our happiness ; they seemed to be landmarks on the way through which we were passing towards a bright future that lay before us.

"We reached the château belonging to her family, where I spent about six weeks, the only time in my life during which heaven has vouchsafed complete happiness to me. I enjoyed pleasures unknown to town-dwellers—all the happiness which two lovers find in living beneath the same roof, an anticipation of the life they will spend together. To stroll through the fields, to be alone together at times, if we wished it, to look over an old water-mill, to sit beneath a tree in some lovely glen among the hills, the lovers' talks, the sweet confidences drawn forth by which each made some progress day by day in the other's heart. Ah ! sir, the out-of-door life, the beauty of earth and heaven, is a perfect accompaniment to the

complete happiness of the soul ! To mingle our careless talk with the song of the birds among the dewy leaves, to smile at each other as we gazed on the sky, to turn our steps slowly homeward at the sound of the bell that always rings too soon, to admire together some little detail in the landscape, to watch the fitful movements of an insect, to look closely at a gleaming demoiselle fly—the delicate creature that resembles an innocent and loving girl ; in such ways as these are not one's thoughts drawn daily a little higher ? The memories of my forty days of happiness have in a manner colored all the rest of my life, memories that are all the fairer and fill the greater space in my thoughts, because since then it has been my fate never to be understood. To this day there are scenes of no special interest for a casual observer, but full of bitter significance for a broken heart, which recall those vanished days, and the love that is not forgotten yet.

“ I do not know whether you noticed the effect of the sunset light on the cottage where little Jacques lives ? Everything shone so brightly in the fiery rays of the sun, and then all at once the whole landscape grew dark and dreary. That sudden change was like the change in my own life at this time. I received from her the first, the sole and sublime token of love that an innocent girl may give ; the more secretly it is given, the closer is the bond it forms, the sweet promise of love, a fragment of the language spoken in a fairer world than this. Sure, therefore, of being beloved, I vowed that I would confess everything at once, that I would have no secrets from her ; I felt ashamed that I had so long delayed to tell her about the sorrows that I had brought upon myself.

“ Unluckily, with the morrow of this happy day a letter came from my son's tutor, the life of the child so dear to me was in danger. I went away without confiding my secret to Evelina, merely telling her family that I was urgently required in Paris. Her parents took alarm during my absence. They feared that there I was entangled in some way, and wrote to

Paris to make inquiries about me. It was scarcely consistent with their religious principles ; but they suspected me, and did not even give me an opportunity of clearing myself.

“One of their friends, without my knowledge, gave them the whole history of my youth, blackening my errors, laying stress upon the existence of my child, which (said they) I intended to conceal. I wrote to my future parents, but I received no answers to my letters ; and when they came back to Paris, and I called at their house, I was not admitted. Much alarmed, I sent to my old friend to learn the reason of this conduct on their part, which I did not in the least understand. As soon as the good soul knew the real cause of it all, he sacrificed himself generously, took upon himself all the blame of my reserve, and tried to exculpate me, but all to no purpose. Questions of interest and morality were regarded so seriously by the family, their prejudices were so firmly and deeply rooted, that they never swerved from their resolution. My despair was overwhelming. At first I tried to deprecate their wrath, but my letters were sent back to me unopened. When every possible means had been tried in vain ; when her father and mother had plainly told my old friend (the cause of my misfortune) that they would never consent to their daughter's marriage with a man who had upon his conscience the death of a woman and the life of a natural son, even though Evelina herself should implore them upon her knees ; then, sir, there only remained to me one last hope, a hope as slender and fragile as the willow-branch at which a drowning wretch catches to save himself.

“I ventured to think that Evelina's love would be stronger than her father's scruples, that her inflexible parents might yield to her entreaties. Perhaps, who knows, her father had kept from her the reasons of the refusal, which were so fatal to our love. I determined to acquaint her with all the circumstances, and to make a final appeal to her ; and in fear and trembling, in grief and tears, my first and last love-letter was

written. To-day I can only dimly remember the words dictated to me by my despair; but I must have told Evelina that if she had dealt sincerely with me she could not and ought not to love another, or how could her whole life be anything but a lie? she must be false either to her future husband or to me. Could she refuse to the lover, who had been so misjudged and hardly entreated, the devotion which she would have shown to him as her husband, if the marriage which had already taken place in our hearts had been outwardly solemnized? Was not this to fall from the ideal of womanly virtue? What woman would not love to feel that the promises of the heart were more sacred and binding than the chains forged by the law? I defended my errors; and in my appeal to the purity of innocence, I left nothing unsaid that could touch a noble and generous nature. But as I am telling you everything, I will look for her answer and my farewell letter," said Benassis, and he went up to his room in search of it.

He returned in a few moments with a worn pocketbook; his hands trembled with emotion as he drew from it some loose sheets.

"Here is the fatal letter," he said. "The girl who wrote those lines little knew the value that I should set upon the scrap of paper that holds her thoughts. This is the last cry that pain wrung from me," he added, taking up a second letter; "I will lay it before you directly. My old friend was the bearer of my letter of entreaty; he gave it to her without her parents' knowledge, humbling his white hair to implore Evelina to read and to reply to my appeal. This was her answer:

"'Monsieur ——' But lately I had been her 'beloved,' the innocent name she had found by which to express her innocent love, and now she called me *Monsieur*!——That one word told me everything. But listen to the rest of the letter—

"'Treachery on the part of one to whom her life was to be

intrusted is a bitter thing for a girl to discover; and yet I could not but excuse you, we are so weak! Your letter touched me, but you must not write to me again, the sight of your handwriting gives me such unbearable pain. We are parted forever. I was carried away by your reasoning; it extinguished all the harsh feelings that had risen up against you in my soul. I had been so proud of your truth! But both of us have found my father's reasoning irresistible. Yes, Monsieur, I ventured to plead for you. I did for you what I have never done before, I overcame the greatest fears that I have ever known, and acted almost against my nature. Even now I am yielding to your entreaties, and doing wrong for your sake, in writing to you without my father's knowledge. My mother knows that I am writing to you; her indulgence in leaving me at liberty to be alone with you for a moment has taught me the depth of her love for me, and strengthened my determination to bow to the decree of my family, against which I had almost rebelled. So I am writing to you, Monsieur, for the first and last time. You have my full and entire forgiveness for the troubles that you have brought into my life. Yes, you are right; a first love can never be forgotten. I am no longer an innocent girl; and, as an honest woman, I can never marry another. What my future will be, I know not therefore. Only you see, Monsieur, that echoes of this year that you have filled will never die away in my life. But I am in no way accusing you—— "I shall always be beloved!" Why did you write those words? Can they bring peace to the troubled soul of a lonely and unhappy girl? Have you not already laid waste my future, giving me memories which will never cease to revisit me? Henceforth I can only give myself to God, but will He accept a broken heart? He has had some purpose to fulfil in sending these afflictions to me; doubtless it was His will that I should turn to Him, my only refuge here below. Nothing remains to me here upon this earth. You have all a man's ambition wherewith to beguile

your sorrows. I do not say this as a reproach ; it is a sort of religious consolation. If we both bear a grievous burden at this moment, I think that my share of it is the heavier. He in whom I have put my trust, and of whom you can feel no jealousy, has joined our lives together, and He puts them asunder according to his will. I have seen that your religious beliefs were not founded upon the pure and living faith which alone enables us to bear our woes here below. Monsieur, if God will vouchsafe to hear my fervent and ceaseless prayers, He will cause His light to shine in your soul. Farewell, you who should have been my guide, you whom once I had the right to call "my beloved," no one can reproach me if I pray for you still. God orders our days as it pleases Him. Perhaps you may be the first whom He will call to himself ; but if I am left alone in the world, then, Monsieur, intrust the care of the child to me.'

"This letter, so full of generous sentiments, disappointed my hopes," Benassis resumed, "so that at first I could think of nothing but my misery ; afterwards I welcomed the balm which, in her forgetfulness of self, she had tried to pour into my wounds, but in my first despair I wrote to her somewhat bitterly—

" 'Mademoiselle—that word alone will tell you that at your bidding I renounce you. There is something indescribably sweet in obeying one we love, who puts us to the torture. You are right, I acquiesce in my condemnation. Once I slighted a girl's devotion ; it is fitting, therefore, that my love should be rejected to-day. But I little thought that my punishment was to be dealt to me by the woman at whose feet I had laid my life. I never expected that such harshness, perhaps I should say, such rigid virtue, lurked in a heart that seemed to be so loving and so tender. At this moment the full strength of my love is revealed to me ; it has survived the most terrible of all trials, the scorn you have shown for me by

severing without regret the ties that bound us. Farewell for ever. There still remains to me the proud humility of repentance : I will find some sphere of life where I can expiate the errors to which you, the mediator between heaven and me, have shown no mercy. Perhaps God may be less inexorable. My sufferings, sufferings full of the thought of you, shall be the penance of a heart which will never be healed, which will bleed in solitude. For a wounded heart—shadow and silence.

“ ‘No other image of love shall be engraven on my heart. Though I am not a woman, I feel as you felt, when I said “I love you,” that it was a vow for life. Yes, the words then spoken in the ear of “my beloved” were not a lie ; you would have a right to scorn me if I could change. I shall never cease to worship you in my solitude. In spite of the gulf set between us, you will still be the mainspring of all my actions, and all the virtues are inspired by penitence and love. Though you have filled my heart with bitterness, I shall never have bitter thoughts of you ; would it not be an ill beginning of the new tasks that I have set myself if I did not purge out all the evil leaven from my soul ? Farewell then to the one heart that I love in the world, a heart from which I am cast out. Never has more feeling and more tenderness been expressed in a farewell, for is it not fraught with the life and soul of one who can never hope again, and must be henceforth as one dead ?——Farewell. May peace be with you, and may all the sorrow of our lot fall to me ? ’ ”

Benassis and Genestas looked at each other for a moment after reading the two letters, each full of sad thoughts, of which neither spoke.

“As you see, this is only a rough copy of my last letter,” said Benassis ; “it is all that remains to me to-day of my blighted hopes. When I had sent the letter, I fell into an indescribable state of depression. All the ties that hold one



to life were bound together in the hope of wedded happiness, which was henceforth lost to me for ever. I had to bid farewell to the joys of a permitted and acknowledged love, to all the generous ideas that had thronged up from the depths of my heart. The prayers of a penitent soul that thirsted for righteousness and for all things lovely and of good report had been rejected by these religious people. At first, the wildest resolutions and most frantic thoughts surged through my mind, but happily for me the sight of my son brought self-control. I felt all the more strongly drawn towards him for the misfortunes of which he was the innocent cause, and for which I had in reality only myself to blame. In him I found all my consolation.

"At the age of thirty-four I might still hope to do my country noble service. I determined to make a name for myself, a name so illustrious that no one should remember the stain on the birth of my son. How many noble thoughts I owe to him! How full a life I led in those days while I was absorbed in planning out his future! I feel stifled," cried Benassis. "All this happened eleven years ago, and yet to this day I cannot bear to think of that fatal year.—My child died, sir; I lost him!"

The doctor was silent, and hid his face in his hands: when he was somewhat calmer he raised his head again, and Genestas saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"At first it seemed as if this thunderbolt had uprooted me," Benassis resumed. "It was a blow from which I could only expect to recover after I had been transplanted into a different soil from that of the social world in which I lived. It was not till some time afterwards that I saw the finger of God in my misfortunes, and later still that I learned to submit to His will and to hearken to His voice. It was impossible that resignation should come to me all at once. My impetuous and fiery nature broke out in a final storm of rebellion.

"It was long before I brought myself to take the only step

befitting a Catholic, indeed my thoughts ran on suicide. This succession of misfortunes had contributed to develop melancholy feelings in me, and I deliberately determined to take my own life. It seemed to me that it was permissible to take leave of life when life was ebbing fast. There was nothing unnatural, I thought, about suicide. The ravages of mental distress affected the soul of man in the same way that acute physical anguish affected the body; and an intelligent being, suffering from a moral malady, had surely a right to destroy himself, a right he shares with the sheep, that, fallen a victim to the 'staggers,' beats its head against a tree. Were the soul's diseases in truth more readily cured than those of the body? I scarcely think so, to this day. Nor do I know which is the more craven soul—he who hopes even when hope is no longer possible, or he who despairs. Death is the natural termination of a physical malady, and it seemed to me that suicide was the final crisis in the sufferings of a mind diseased, for it was in the power of the will to end them when reason showed that death was preferable to life. So it is not the pistol, but a thought that puts an end to our existence. Again, when fate may suddenly lay us low in the midst of a happy life, can we be blamed for ourselves refusing to bear a life of misery?

"But my reflections during that time of mourning turned on loftier themes. The grandeur of pagan philosophy attracted me, and for a while I became a convert. In my efforts to discover new rights for man, I thought that with the aid of modern thought I could penetrate further into the questions to which those old-world systems of philosophy had furnished solutions.

"Epicurus permitted suicide. Was it not the natural outcome of his system of ethics? The gratification of the senses was to be obtained at any cost; and when this became impossible, the easiest and best course was for the animate being to return to the repose of inanimate nature. Happiness, or the hope of happiness, was the one end for which

man existed, for one who suffered, and who suffered without hope, death ceased to be an evil, and became a good, and suicide became a final act of wisdom. This act Epicurus neither blamed nor praised; he was content to say as he poured a libation to Bacchus, 'As for death, there is nothing in death to move our laughter or our tears.'

"With a loftier morality than that of the Epicureans, and a sterner sense of man's duties, Zeno and the Stoic philosophers prescribed suicide in certain cases to their followers. They reasoned thus: Man differs from the brute in that he has the sovereign right to dispose of his person; take away this power of life and death over himself, and he becomes the plaything of fate, the slave of other men. Rightly understood, this power of life and death is a sufficient counterpoise for all the ills of life; the same power when conferred upon another, upon his fellow-man, leads to tyranny of every kind. Man has no power whatever unless he has unlimited freedom of action. Suppose that he has been guilty of some irreparable error, from the shameful consequences of which there is no escape; a sordid nature swallows down the disgrace and survives it, the wise man drinks the hemlock and dies. Suppose that the remainder of life is to be one constant struggle with the gout which racks our bones, or with a gnawing and disfiguring cancer, the wise man dismisses quacks, and at the proper moment bids a last farewell to the friends whom he only saddens by his presence. Or another perhaps has fallen alive into the hands of the tyrant against whom he fought. What shall he do? The oath of allegiance is tendered to him; he must either subscribe or stretch out his neck to the executioner; the fool takes the latter course, the coward subscribes, the wise man strikes a last blow for liberty—in his own heart. 'You who are free,' the Stoic was wont to say, 'know then how to preserve your freedom! Find freedom from your own passions by sacrificing them to duty, freedom from the tyranny of mankind by pointing to the sword or the

poison which will put you beyond their reach, freedom from the bondage of fate by determining the point beyond which you will endure it no longer, freedom of mind by shaking off the trammels of prejudice, and freedom from physical fear by learning how to subdue the gross instinct which causes so many wretches to cling to life.'

"After I had unearthed this reasoning from among a heap of ancient philosophical writings, I sought to reconcile it with Christian teaching. God has bestowed free-will upon us in order to require of us an account hereafter before the throne of judgment. 'I will plead my cause there!' I said to myself. But such thoughts as these led me to think of a life after death, and my old shaken beliefs rose up before me. Human life grows solemn when all eternity hangs upon the slightest of our decisions. When the full meaning of this thought is realized, the soul becomes conscious of something vast and mysterious within itself, by which it is drawn towards the Infinite; the aspect of all things alters strangely. From this point of view life is something infinitely great and infinitely little. The consciousness of my sins had never made me think of heaven so long as hope remained to me on earth, so long as I could find a relief for my woes in work and in the society of other men. I had meant to make the happiness of a woman's life, to love, to be the head of a family, and in this way my need of expiation would have been satisfied to the full. This design had been thwarted, but yet another way had remained to me:

"I would devote myself henceforward to my child. But after these two efforts had failed, and scorn and death had darkened my soul for ever, when all my feelings had been wounded and nothing was left to me here on earth, I raised my eyes to heaven, and beheld God.

"Yet still I tried to obtain the sanction of religion for my death. I went carefully through the Gospels, and found no passage in which suicide was sanctioned; but during the read-

ing the divine thought of Christ, the Saviour of men, dawned in me. Certainly He had said nothing about the immortality of the soul, but He had spoken of the glorious kingdom of His Father; He had nowhere sanctioned parricide, but He condemned all that was evil. The glory of His evangelists, and the proof of their divine mission, is not so much that they made laws for the world, but that they spread a new spirit abroad, and the new laws were filled with this new spirit. The very courage which a man displays in taking his own life seemed to me to be his condemnation; so long as he felt that he had within himself sufficient strength to die by his own hands, he ought to have had strength enough to continue the struggle. To refuse to suffer is a sign of weakness rather than of courage, and, moreover, was it not a sort of recusance to take leave of life in despondency, an abjuration of the Christian faith which is based upon the sublime words of Jesus Christ, 'Blessed are they that mourn.'

"So, in any case, suicide seemed to me to be an unpardonable error, even in the man who, through a false conception of greatness of soul, takes his life a few moments before the executioner's axe falls. In humbling himself to the death of the cross, did not Jesus Christ set for us an example of obedience to all human laws, even when carried out unjustly? The word 'resignation' engraved upon the cross, so clear to the eyes of those who can read the sacred characters in which it is traced, shone for me with divine brightness.

"I still had eighty thousand francs in my possession, and at first I meant to live a retired and solitary life, to vegetate in some country district for the rest of my days; but misanthropy is no Catholic virtue, and there is a certain vanity lurking beneath the hedgehog's skin of the misanthrope. His heart does not bleed, it shrivels, and my heart bled from every vein. I thought of the discipline of the Church, the refuge that she affords to sorrowing souls, understood at last the beauty of a

life of prayer in solitude, and was fully determined to 'enter religion,' in the grand old phrase. So far my intentions were firmly fixed, but I had not yet decided on the best means of carrying them out. I realized the remains of my fortune, and set forth on my journey with an almost tranquil mind. *Peace in God* was a hope that could never fail me.

"I felt drawn to the rule of Saint Bruno, and made the journey to the Grande Chartreuse on foot, absorbed in solemn thoughts. That was a memorable day. I was not prepared for the grandeur of the scenery; the workings of an unknown power greater than that of man were visible at every step, the overhanging crags, the precipices on either hand, the stillness only broken by the voices of the mountain streams, the sternness and wildness of the landscape, relieved here and there by nature's fairest creations, pine trees that have stood for centuries, and delicate rock plants at their feet, all combined to produce sober musings. There seemed to be no end to this waste solitude, shut in by its lofty mountain barriers. The idle curiosity of man could scarcely penetrate there. It would be difficult to cross this melancholy desert of Saint Bruno's with a light heart.

"I saw the Grande Chartreuse. I walked beneath the vaulted roofs of the ancient cloisters, and heard in the silence the sound of the water from the spring, falling drop by drop. I entered a cell that I might the better realize my own utter nothingness, something of the peace that my predecessor had found there seemed to pass into my soul. An inscription, which in accordance with the custom of the monastery he had written above his door, impressed and touched me; all the precepts of the life that I meant to lead were there, summed up in three Latin words—*Fuge, late, tace.*"

Genestas bent his head as if he understood.

"My decision was made," Benassis resumed. "The cell with its deal wainscot, the hard bed, the solitude, all appealed to my soul. The Carthusians were in the chapel; I went

thither to join in their prayers, and there my resolutions vanished. I do not wish to criticise the Catholic Church, I am perfectly orthodox, I believe in its laws and in the works it prescribes. But when I heard the chanting and the prayers of those old men, dead to the world and forgotten by the world, I discerned an undercurrent of sublime egoism in the life of the cloister. This withdrawal from the world could only benefit the individual soul, and after all what was it but a protracted suicide? I do not condemn it. The Church has opened these tombs in which life is buried; no doubt they are needful for those few Christians who are absolutely useless to the world; but for me, it would be better, I thought, to live among my fellows, to devote my life of expiation to their service.

"As I returned I thought long and carefully over the various ways in which I could carry out my vow of renunciation. Already I began, in fancy, to lead the life of a common sailor, condemning myself to serve our country in the lowest ranks, and giving up all my intellectual ambitions; but though it was a life of toil and of self-abnegation, it seemed to me that I ought to do more than this. Should I not thwart the designs of God by leading such a life? If He had given me intellectual ability, was it not my duty to employ it for the good of my fellow-men? Then, besides, if I am to speak frankly, I felt within me a need of my fellow-men, an indescribable wish to help them. The round of mechanical duties and the routine tasks of the sailor afforded no scope for this desire, which is as much an outcome of my nature as the characteristic scent that a flower breathes forth.

"I was obliged to spend the night here, as I have already told you. The wretched condition of the countryside had filled me with pity, and during the night it seemed as if these thoughts had been sent to me by God, and that thus He had revealed His will to me. I had known something of the joys that pierce the heart, the happiness and the sorrow of mother-

hood ; I determined that henceforth my life should be filled with these, but that mine should be a wider sphere than a mother's. I would expend her care and kindness on a whole district ; I would be a sister of charity, and bind the wounds of all the suffering poor in a countryside. It seemed to me that the finger of God unmistakably pointed out my destiny ; and when I remembered that my first serious thoughts in youth had inclined me to the study of medicine, I resolved to settle here as a doctor. Besides, I had another reason. 'For a wounded heart—shadow and silence ;' so I had written in my letter ; and I meant to fulfil the vow which I had made to myself.

"So I have entered into the paths of silence and submission. The *fuge, late, tace* of the Carthusian brother is my motto here, my death to the world is the life of this canton, my prayer takes the form of the active work to which I have set my hand, and which I love—the work of sowing the seeds of happiness and joy, of giving to others what I myself have not.

"I have grown so used to this life, completely out of the world and among the peasants, that I am thoroughly transformed. Even my face is altered ; it has been so continually exposed to the sun that it has grown wrinkled and weather-beaten. I have fallen into the habits of the peasants ; I have assumed their dress, their ways of talking, their gait, their easy-going negligence, their utter indifference to appearances. My old acquaintances in Paris, or the she-coxcombs on whom I used to dance attendance, would be puzzled to recognize in me the man who had a certain vogue in his day, the sybarite accustomed to all the splendor, luxury, and finery of Paris. I have come to be absolutely indifferent to my surroundings, like all those who are possessed by one thought, and have only one object in view ; for I have but one aim in life—to take leave of it as soon as possible. I do not want to hasten my end in any way ; but some day, when illness comes, I shall lie down to die without regret.



"There, sir, you have the whole story of my life until I came here—told in all sincerity. I have not attempted to conceal any of my errors; they have been great, though others have erred as I have erred. I have suffered greatly, and I am suffering still, but I look beyond this life to a happy future which can only be reached through sorrow. And yet, for all my resignation, there are moments when my courage fails me. This very day I was almost overcome in your presence by inward anguish; you did not notice it, but ——"

Genestas started in his chair.

"Yes, Captain Bluteau, you were with me at the time. Do you remember how, while we were putting little Jacques to bed, you pointed to the mattress on which Mother Colas sleeps? Well, you can imagine how painful it all was; I can never see any child without thinking of the dear child I have lost, and this little one was doomed to die! I can never see a child with indifferent eyes——"

Genestas turned pale.

"Yes, the sight of the little golden heads, the innocent beauty of children's faces always awakens memories of my sorrows, and the old anguish returns afresh. Now and then, too, there comes the intolerable thought that so many people here should thank me for what little I can do for them, when all that I have done has been prompted by remorse. You alone, captain, know the secret of my life. If I had drawn my will to serve them from some purer source than the memory of my errors, I should be happy indeed! But then, too, there would have been nothing to tell you, and no story about myself."



## ELEGIES.

As Benassis finished his story, he was struck by the troubled expression of the officer's face. It touched him to have been so well understood. He was almost ready to reproach himself for having distressed his visitor. He spoke—

"But these troubles of mine, Captain Bluteau——"

"Do not call me Captain Bluteau," cried Genestas, breaking in upon the doctor, and springing to his feet with sudden energy, a change of position that seemed to be prompted by inward dissatisfaction of some kind. "There is no such person as Captain Bluteau—I am a scoundrel!"

With no little astonishment, Benassis beheld Genestas pacing to and fro in the salon, like a bumble-bee in quest of an exit from the room which he has incautiously entered.

"Then who are you, sir?" inquired Benassis.

"Ah! there now," the officer answered, as he turned and took his stand before the doctor, though he lacked courage to look at his friend. "I have deceived you!" he went on (and there was a change in his voice). "I have acted a lie for the first time in my life, and I am well punished for it; for after this I cannot explain why I came here to play the spy upon you, confound it! Ever since I have had a glimpse of your soul, so to speak, I would far sooner have taken a box on the ear whenever I heard you call me Captain Bluteau! Perhaps you may forgive me for this subterfuge, but I shall never forgive myself; I, Pierre Joseph Genestas, who would not lie to save my life before a court-martial!"

"Are you Commandant Genestas?" cried Benassis, rising to his feet. He grasped the officer's hand warmly, and added: "As you said but a short time ago, sir, we were friends before

we knew each other. I have been very anxious to make your acquaintance, for I have often heard M. Gravier speak of you. He used to call you 'one of Plutarch's men.' "

"Plutarch? Nothing of the sort!" answered Genestas. "I am not worthy of you; I could thrash myself. I ought to have told you my secret in a straightforward way at the first. Yet no! It is quite as well that I wore a mask, and came here myself in search of information concerning you, for now I know that I must hold my tongue. If I had set about this business in the right fashion it would have been painful to you, and God forbid that I should give you the slightest annoyance."

"But I do not understand you, commandant."

"Let the matter drop. I am not ill; I have spent a pleasant day, and I will go back to-morrow. Whenever you come to Grenoble, you will find that you have one more friend there, who will be your friend through thick and thin. Pierre Joseph Genestas' sword and purse are at your disposal, and I am yours to the last drop of my blood. Well, after all, your words have fallen on good soil. When I am pensioned off, I will look for some out-of-the-way little place, and be mayor of it, and try to follow your example. I have not your knowledge, but I will study at any rate."

"You are right, sir; the landowner who spends his time in convincing a commune of the folly of some mistaken notion of agriculture confers upon his country a benefit quite as great as any that the most skilful physician can bestow. The latter lessens the sufferings of some few individuals, and the former heals the wounds of his country. But you have excited my curiosity to no common degree. Is there really something in which I can be of use to you?"

"Of use?" repeated the commandant in an altered voice. "*Mon Dieu!* I was about to ask you to do me a service which is all but impossible, M. Benassis. Just listen a moment! I have killed a good many Christians in my time, it is true;

but you may kill people and keep a good heart for all that ; so there are some things that I can feel and understand, rough as I look."

"But go on !"

"No, I do not want to give you any pain if I can help it."

"Oh ! commandant, I can bear a great deal."

"It is a question of a child's life, sir," said the officer, nervously.

Benassis suddenly knitted his brows, but by a gesture he entreated Genestas to continue.

"A child," repeated the commandant, "whose life may yet be saved by constant watchfulness and incessant care. Where could I expect to find a doctor capable of devoting himself to a single patient ? Not in a town, that much is certain. I had heard you spoken of as an excellent man, but I wished to be quite sure that this reputation was well founded. So before putting my little charge into the hands of this M. Benassis of whom people spoke so highly, I wanted to study him myself. But now——"

"Enough," said the doctor ; "so this child is yours ?"

"No, no, M. Benassis. To clear up the mystery, I should have to tell you a long story, in which I do not exactly play the part of a hero ; but you have given me your confidence, and I can readily give you mine."

"One moment, commandant," said the doctor. In answer to his summons, Jacquotte appeared at once, and her master ordered tea. "You see, commandant, at night when every one is sleeping, I do not sleep.—The thought of my troubles lies heavily on me, and then I try to forget them by taking tea. It produces a sort of nervous inebriation—a kind of slumber, without which I could not live. Do you still decline to take it ?"

"For my own part," said Genestas, "I prefer your Hermitage."

"By all means. Jacquotte," said Benassis, turning to his

housekeeper, "bring in some wine and biscuits. We will both of us have our night-cap after our separate fashions."

"That tea must be very bad for you!" Genestas remarked.

"It brings on horrid attacks of gout, but I cannot break myself of the habit, it is too soothing; it procures for me a brief respite every night, a few moments during which life becomes less of a burden—— Come. I am listening; perhaps your story will efface the painful impressions left by the memories that I have just recalled."

Genestas set down his empty glass upon the chimney-piece. "After the retreat from Moscow," he said, "my regiment was stationed to recruit for a while in a little town in Poland. We were quartered there, in fact, till the Emperor returned, and we bought up horses at long prices. So far so good. I ought to say that I had a friend in those days. More than once during the retreat I had owed my life to him. He was a quartermaster, Renard by name; we could not but be like brothers (military discipline apart) after what he had done for me. They billeted us on the same house, a sort of shanty, a rat-hole of a place where a whole family lived, though you would not have thought there was room to stable a horse. This particular hovel belonged to some Jews who carried on their six-and-thirty trades in it. The frost had not so stiffened the old father Jew's fingers but that he could count gold fast enough; he had thriven uncommonly during our reverses. That sort of gentry lives in squalor and dies in gold.

"There were cellars underneath (lined with wood of course, the whole house was built of wood); they had stowed their children away down there, and one more particularly, a girl of seventeen, as handsome as a Jewess can be when she keeps herself tidy and has not fair hair. She was as white as snow, she had eyes like velvet, and dark lashes to them like rats' tails; her hair was so thick and glossy that it made you long to stroke it. She was perfection and nothing less! I was the first to discover this curious arrangement. I was walking up

and down outside one evening, smoking my pipe, after they thought I had gone to bed. The children came in helter-skelter, tumbling over one another like so many puppies. It was fun to watch them. Then they had supper with their father and mother. I strained my eyes to see the young Jewess through the clouds of smoke that her father blew from his pipe; she looked like a new gold-piece among a lot of copper coins.

"I had never reflected about love, my dear Benassis, I had never had time; but now at the sight of this young girl I lost my heart and head and everything else at once, and then it was plain to me that I had never been in love before. I was hard hit, and over head and ears in love. There I stayed smoking my pipe, absorbed in watching the Jewess until she blew out the candle and went to bed. I could not close my eyes. The whole night long I walked up and down the street smoking my pipe and refilling it from time to time. I had never felt like that before, and for the first and last time in my life I thought of marrying.

"At daybreak I saddled my horse and rode out in the country, to clear my head. I kept him at a trot for two mortal hours, and all but foundered the animal before I noticed it——"

Genestas stopped short, looked at his new friend uneasily, and said, "You must excuse me, Benassis, I am no orator; things come out just as they turn up in my mind. In a room full of fine folk I should feel awkward, but here in the country with you——"

"Go on," said the doctor.

"When I came back to my room I found Renard finely flustered. He thought I had fallen in a duel. He was cleaning his pistols, his head full of schemes for fastening a quarrel on any one who should have turned me off into the dark—— Oh! that was just the fellow's way! I confided my story to Renard, showed him the kennel where the children were; and, as my comrade understood the jargon that those

heathens talked, I begged him to help me to lay my proposals before her father and mother, and to try to arrange some kind of communication between me and Judith. Judith they called her. In short, sir, for a fortnight the Jew and his wife so arranged matters that we supped every night with Judith, and for a fortnight I was the happiest of men. You understand and you know how it was, so I shall not wear out your patience ; still, if you do not smoke, you cannot imagine how pleasant it was to smoke a pipe at one's ease with Renard and the girl's father and one's princess there before one's eyes. Oh ! yes, it was very pleasant !

“ But I ought to tell you that Renard was a Parisian, and depended on his father, a wholesale grocer, who had educated his son with a view to making a notary of him ; so Renard had come by a certain amount of book learning before he had been drawn by the conscription and had to bid his desk good-bye. Add to this that he was the kind of man who looks well in a uniform, with a face like a girl's, and a thorough knowledge of the art of wheedling people. It was *he* whom Judith loved ; she cared about as much for me as a horse cares for roast fowls. Whilst I was in the seventh heaven, soaring above the clouds at the bare sight of Judith, my friend Renard (who, as you see, fairly deserved his name) was making a way for himself underground. The traitor arrived at an understanding with the girl, and to such good purpose that they were married forthwith after the custom of her country, without waiting for permission, which would have been too long in coming. He promised her, however, that if it should happen that the validity of this marriage was afterwards called in question, they were to be married again according to French law. As a matter of fact, as soon as she reached France, Mme. Renard became Mlle. Judith once more.

“ If I had known all this, I would have killed Renard then and there, without giving him time to draw another breath ; but the father, the mother, the girl herself, and the quarter-

master were all in the plot like thieves in a fair. While I was smoking my pipe, and worshiping Judith as if she had been one of the saints above, the worthy Renard was arranging to meet her, and managing this piece of business very cleverly under my very eyes.

“You are the only person to whom I have told this story. A disgraceful thing, I call it. I have always asked myself how it is that a man who would die of shame if he took a gold coin that did not belong to him, does not scruple to rob a friend of happiness and life and the woman he loves. My birds, in fact, were married and happy; and there was I, every evening at supper, moonstruck, gazing at Judith, responding like some fellow in a farce to the looks she threw at me in order to throw dust in my eyes. They have paid uncommonly dear for all this deceit, as you will certainly think. On my conscience, God pays more attention to what goes on in this world than some of us imagine.

“Down come the Russians upon us, the country is overrun, and the campaign of 1813 begins in earnest. One fine morning comes an order; we are to be on the battlefield of Lützen by a stated hour. The Emperor knew quite well what he was about when he ordered us to start at once. The Russians had turned our flank. Our colonel must needs get himself into a scrape, by choosing that moment to take leave of a Polish lady who lived outside the town, a quarter of a mile away; the Cossack advanced guard just caught him nicely, him and his picket. There was scarcely time to spring into our saddles and draw up before the town so as to engage in a cavalry skirmish. We must check the Russian advance if we meant to draw off during the night. Again and again we charged, and for three hours we did wonders. Under cover of the fighting the baggage and artillery set out. We had a park of artillery and great stores of powder, of which the Emperor stood in desperate need; they must reach him at all costs.

“Our resistance deceived the Russians, who thought at first



that we were supported by an army corps; but before very long they learned their error from their scouts, and knew that they had only a single regiment of cavalry to deal with and the invalided foot soldiers in the dépôt. On finding it out, sir, they made a murderous onslaught on us towards evening; the action was so hot that a goodly number of us were left on the field. We were completely surrounded. I was by Renard's side in the front rank, and I saw how my friend fought and charged like a demon; he was thinking of his wife. Thanks to him, we managed to regain the town, which our invalids had put more or less in a state of defence, but it was pitiful to see it. We were the last to return—he and I. A body of Cossacks appeared in our way, and on this we rode in hot haste. One of the savages was about to run me through with a lance, when Renard, catching a sight of his manoeuvre, thrust his horse between us to turn aside the blow; his poor brute, a fine animal it was upon my word, received the lance-thrust and fell, bringing down both Renard and the Cossack with him. I killed the Cossack, seized Renard by the arm, and laid him crosswise before me on my horse like a sack of wheat.

“‘Good-bye, captain,’ Renard said; ‘it is all over with me.’

“‘Not yet,’ I answered; ‘I must have a look at you.’ We had reached the town by that time; I dismounted, and propped him up on a little straw by the corner of a house. A bad wound in the head had laid open the brain, and yet he spoke!— Oh! he was a brave man.’

“‘We are quits,’ he said. ‘I have given you my life, and I had taken Judith from you. Take care of her and of her child, if she has one. And not only so—you must marry her.’

“I left him then and there, sir, like a dog; when the first fury of anger left me, and I went back again—he was dead. The Cossacks had set fire to the town, and the





*I TOOK HER UP BEHIND ME IN THE SADDLE.*



thought of Judith then came to my mind. I went in search of her, took her up behind me in the saddle, and, thanks to my swift horse, caught up the regiment which was effecting its retreat. As for the Jew and his family, there was not one of them left, they had all disappeared like rats; there was no one but Judith in the house, waiting alone there for Renard. At first, as you can understand, I told her not a word of all that had happened.

“So it befell that all through the disastrous campaign of 1813 I had a woman to look after, to find quarters for her, and to see that she was comfortable. She scarcely knew, I think, the straits to which we were reduced. I was always careful to keep her ten leagues ahead of us as we drew back towards France. Her boy was born while we were fighting at Hanau. I was wounded in the engagement, and only rejoined Judith at Strasburg; then I returned to Paris, for, unluckily, I was laid up all through the campaign in France. If it had not been for that wretched mishap, I should have entered the Grenadier Guards, and then the Emperor would have promoted me. As it was, sir, I had three broken ribs and another man’s wife and child to support! My pay, as you can imagine, was not exactly the wealth of the Indies. Renard’s father, the toothless old shark, would have nothing to say to his daughter-in-law; and the old father Jew had made off. Judith was fretting herself to death. She cried one morning while she was dressing my wound.

“ ‘Judith,’ I said, ‘your child has nothing whatever in this world——’

“ ‘Neither have I!’ she said.

“ ‘Pshaw!’ I answered, ‘we will send for all the necessary papers, I will marry you; and as for his child, I will look on him as mine——’ I could not say any more.

“Ah, my dear sir, what would not one do for the look by which Judith thanked me—a look of thanks from dying eyes; I saw clearly that I had loved and should love her always,

and from that day her child found a place in my heart. She died, poor woman, while the father and mother Jews and the papers were on the way. The day before she died, she found strength enough to rise and dress herself for her wedding, to go through all the usual performance, and set her name to their pack of papers ; then, when her child had a name and a father, she went back to her bed again ; I kissed her hands and her forehead, and she died.

“That was my wedding. Two days later, when I had bought the few feet of earth in which the poor girl is laid, I found myself the father of an orphan child. I put him out to nurse during the campaign of 1815. Ever since that time, without letting any one know my story, which did not sound very well, I have looked after the little rogue as if he were my own child. I don't know what became of his grandfather ; he is wandering about, a ruined man, somewhere or other between Russia and Persia. The chances are that he may make a fortune some day, for he seemed to understand the trade in precious stones.

“I sent the child to school. I wanted him to take a good place at the École Polytechnique and to see him graduate there with credit, so of late I have had him drilled in mathematics to such good purpose that the poor little soul has been knocked up by it. He has a delicate chest. By all I can make out from the doctors in Paris, there would be some hope for him still if he were allowed to run wild among the hills, if he was properly cared for, and constantly looked after by somebody who was willing to undertake the task. So I thought of you, and I came here to take stock of your ideas and your ways of life. After what you have told me, I could not possibly cause you pain in this way, for we are good friends already.”

“Commandant,” said Benassis after a moment's pause, “bring Judith's child here to me. It is doubtless God's will to submit me to this final trial, and I will endure it. I will

offer up these sufferings to God, whose Son died upon the cross. Besides, your story has awakened tender feelings; does not that augur well for me?"

Genestas took both of Benassis' hands and pressed them warmly, unable to check the tears that filled his eyes and coursed down his sunburnt face.

"Let us keep silence with regard to all this," he said.

"Yes, commandant. You are not drinking?"

"I am not thirsty," Genestas answered. "I am a perfect fool!"

"Well, when will you bring him to me?"

"Why, to-morrow, if you will let me. He has been at Grenoble these two days."

"Good! Set out to-morrow morning and come back again. I shall wait for you in La Fosseuse's cottage, and we will all four of us breakfast there together."

"Agreed," said Genestas, and the two friends as they went upstairs bade each other good-night. When they reached the landing that lay between their rooms, Genestas set down his candle on the window ledge and turned towards Benassis.

"God's thunder!" he said, with outspoken enthusiasm; "I cannot let you go without telling you that you are the third among christened men to make me understand that there is something up there," and he pointed to the sky.

The doctor's answer was a smile full of sadness and a cordial grasp of the hand that Genestas held out to him.

Before daybreak next morning Commandant Genestas was on his way. On his return, it was noon before he reached the spot on the high road between Grenoble and the little town, where the pathway turned that led to La Fosseuse's cottage. He was seated in one of the light open cars with four wheels, drawn by one horse, that are in use everywhere on the roads in these hilly districts. Genestas' companion was a thin, delicate-looking lad, apparently about twelve years of age,



though in reality he was in his sixteenth year. Before alighting, the officer looked round about him in several directions in search of a peasant who would take the carriage back to Benassis' house. It was impossible to drive to La Fosseuse's cottage, the pathway was too narrow. The park-keeper happened to appear upon the scene, and helped Genestas out of his difficulty, so that the officer and his adopted son were at liberty to follow the mountain footpath that led to the trysting-place.

"Would you not enjoy spending a year in running about in this lovely country, Adrien? Learning to hunt and to ride a horse, instead of growing pale over your books? Stay! look there!"

Adrien obediently glanced over the valley with languid indifference; like all lads of his age, he cared nothing for the beauty of natural scenery; so he only said, "You are very kind, father," without checking his walk.

The invalid listlessness of this answer went to Genestas' heart; he said no more to his son, and they reached La Fosseuse's house in silence.

"You are punctual, commandant!" cried Benassis, rising from the wooden bench where he was sitting.

But at the sight of Adrien he sat down again, and seemed for a while to be lost in thought. In a leisurely fashion he scanned the lad's sallow, weary face, not without admiring its delicate oval outlines, one of the most noticeable characteristics of a noble head. The lad was the living image of his mother. He had her olive complexion, beautiful black eyes with a sad and thoughtful expression in them, long hair, a head too energetic for the fragile body; all the peculiar beauty of the Polish Jewess had been transmitted to her son.

"Do you sleep soundly, my little man?" Benassis asked him.

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see your knees; turn back your trousers."

Adrien reddened, unfastened his garters, and showed his knees to the doctor, who felt them carefully over.

"Good. Now speak; shout, shout as loud as you can." Adrien obeyed.

"That will do. Now give me your hands."

The lad held them out; white, soft, and blue-veined hands, like those of a woman.

"Where were you at school in Paris?"

"At Saint Louis."

"Did your master read his breviary during the night?"

"Yes, sir."

"So you did not go straight off to sleep?"

As Adrien made no answer to this, Genestas spoke. "The master is a worthy priest; he advised me to take my little rascal away on the score of his health," he told the doctor.

"Well," answered Benassis, with a clear penetrating gaze into Adrien's frightened eyes, "there is a good chance. Oh, we shall make a man of him yet. We will live together like a pair of comrades, my boy! We will keep early hours. I mean to show this boy of yours how to ride a horse, commandant. He shall be put on a milk diet for a month or two, so as to get his digestion into order again, and then I will take out a shooting license for him, and put him in Butifer's hands, and the two of them shall have some chamois hunting. Give your son four or five months of outdoor life, and you will not know him again, commandant! How delighted Butifer will be! I know the fellow; he will take you over into Switzerland, my young friend; haul you over the Alpine passes and up the mountain peaks, and add six inches to your height in six months; he will put some color into your cheeks and brace your nerves, and make you forget all these bad ways that you have fallen into at school. And after that you can go back to your work; and you will be a man some of these days. Butifer is an honest young fellow. We can trust him with the money necessary for traveling expenses and your

hunting expeditions. The responsibility will keep him steady for six months, and that will be a very good thing for him."

Genestas' face brightened more and more at every word the doctor spoke.

"Now, let us go in to breakfast. La Fosseuse is very anxious to see you," said Benassis, giving Adrien a gentle tap on the cheek.

Genestas took the doctor's arm and drew him a little aside. "Then he is not consumptive after all?" he asked.

"No more than you or I."

"Then what is the matter with him?"

"Pshaw!" answered Benassis; "he is a little run down, that is all."

La Fosseuse appeared on the threshold of the door; and Genestas noticed, not without surprise, her simple but coquetish costume. This was not the peasant girl of yesterday evening, but a graceful and well-dressed Parisian woman, against whose glances he felt that he was not proof. The soldier turned his eyes on the table, which was made of walnut wood. There was no table-cloth, but the surface might have been varnished, it was so well rubbed and polished. Eggs, butter, a rice pudding, and fragrant wild strawberries had been set out, and the poor child had put flowers everywhere about the room; evidently it was a great day for her. At the sight of all this, the commandant could not help looking enviously at the little house and the green sward about it, and watched the peasant girl with an air that expressed both his doubts and his hopes. Then his eyes fell on Adrien, with whom La Fosseuse was deliberately busying herself, and handing him the eggs.

"Now, commandant," said Benassis, "you know the terms on which you are receiving hospitality. You must tell La Fosseuse 'something about the army.'"

"But let the gentleman first have his breakfast in peace, and then, after he has taken a cup of coffee——"

"By all means, I shall be very glad," answered the commandant; "but it must be upon one condition, you will tell us the story of some adventure in your past life, will you not, mademoiselle?"

"Why, nothing worth telling has ever happened to me, sir," she answered, as her color rose. "Will you take a little more rice pudding?" she added, as she saw that Adrien's plate was empty.

"If you please, mademoiselle."

"The pudding is delicious," said Genestas.

"Then what will you say to her coffee and cream?" cried Benassis.

"I would rather hear our pretty hostess talk."

"You did not put that nicely, Genestas," said Benassis. He took La Fosseuse's hand in his and pressed it as he went on: "Listen, my child; there is a kind heart hidden away beneath that officer's stern exterior, and you can talk freely before him. We do not want to press you to talk, do not tell us anything unless you like; but if ever you can be listened to and understood, poor little one, it will be by the three who are with you now at this moment. Tell us all about your love affairs in the old days, that will not admit us into any of the real secrets of your heart."

"Here is Mariette with the coffee," she answered, "and as soon as you are all served, I will tell about my 'love affairs' very willingly. But M. le Commandant will not forget his promise?" she added, challenging the officer with a shy glance.

"That would be impossible, mademoiselle," Genestas answered respectfully.

"When I was sixteen years old," La Fosseuse began, "I had to beg my bread on the roadside in Savoy, though my health was very bad. I used to sleep at Échelles, in a manger full of straw. The innkeeper who gave me shelter was kind, but his wife could not abide me, and was always saying hard

things. I used to feel very miserable ; for although I was a beggar, I was not a naughty child ; I used to say my prayers every night and morning, I never stole anything, and I did as heaven bade me in begging for my living, for there was nothing that I could turn my hands to, and I was really unfit for work—quite unable to handle a hoe or to wind spools of cotton.

“ Well, they drove me away from the inn at last ; a dog was the cause of it all. I had neither father nor mother nor friends. I had met with no one, ever since I was born, whose eyes had any kindness in them for me. Morin, the old woman who had brought me up, was dead. She had been very good to me, but I cannot remember that she ever petted me much ; besides, she worked out in the fields like a man, poor thing ; and if she fondled me at times, she also used to rap my fingers with the spoon if I ate the soup too fast out of the porringer we had between us. Poor old woman, never a day passes but I remember her in my prayers ! If it might please God to let her live a happier life up there than she did here below ! And, above all things, if she might only lie a little softer there, for she was always grumbling about the pallet-bed that we both used to sleep upon. You could not possibly imagine how it hurts one’s soul to be repulsed by every one, to receive nothing but hard words and looks that cut you to the heart, just as if they were so many stabs of a knife. I have known poor old people who were so used to these things that they did not mind them a bit, but I was not born for that sort of life. A ‘no’ always made me cry. Every evening I came back again more unhappy than ever, and only felt comforted when I had said my prayers. In all God’s world, in fact, there was not a soul to care for me, no one to whom I could pour out my heart. My only friend was the blue sky. I have always been happy when there was a cloudless sky above my head. I used to lie and watch the weather from some nook among the crags when the wind had

swept the clouds away. At such times I used to dream that I was a great lady. I used to gaze into the sky till I felt myself bathed in the blue ; I lived up there in thought, rising higher and higher yet, till my troubles weighed on me no more, and there was nothing but gladness left.

“ But to return to my love affairs. I must tell you that the innkeeper’s spaniel had a dear little puppy, just as sensible as a human being ; he was quite white, with black spots on his paws, a cherub of a puppy ! I can see him yet. Poor little fellow, he was the only creature who ever gave me a friendly look in those days ; I kept all my tit-bits for him. He knew me, and came to look for me every evening. How he used to spring up at me ! And he would bite my feet, he was not ashamed of my poverty ; there was something so grateful and so kind in his eyes that it brought tears into mine to see it. ‘ That is the one living creature that really cares for me ! ’ I used to say. He slept at my feet that winter. It hurt me so much to see him beaten, that I broke him of the habit of going into houses to steal bones, and he was quite contented with my crusts. When I was unhappy, he used to come and stand in front of me, and look into my eyes ; it was just as if he said, ‘ So you are sad, my poor Fosseuse ? ’

“ If a traveler threw me some halfpence, he would pick them up out of the dust and bring them to me, clever little spaniel that he was ! I was less miserable so long as I had that friend. Every day I put away a few halfpence, for I wanted to get fifteen francs together, so that I might buy him of father Manseau. One day his wife saw that the dog was fond of me, so she herself took a sudden violent fancy to him. The dog, mind you, could not bear her. Oh, animals know people by instinct ! If you really care for them, they find it out in a moment. I had a gold coin, a twenty-franc piece, sewed into the band of my skirt ; so I spoke to M. Manseau : ‘ Dear sir, I meant to offer you my year’s savings for your dog ; but now your wife has a mind to keep him, although she cares

very little about him, and rather than that, will you sell him to me for twenty francs? Look, I have the money here.'

"'No, no, little woman,' he said; 'put up your twenty francs. Heaven forbid that I should take their money from the poor! Keep the dog; and if my wife makes a fuss about it, you must go away.'

"His wife made a terrible to-do about the dog. Ah! *mon Dieu!* any one might have thought the house was on fire! You never would guess the notion that next came into her head. She saw that the little fellow looked on me as his mistress, and that she could only have him against his will, so she had him poisoned; and so my poor spaniel died in my arms—— I cried over him as if he had been my child, and buried him under a pine tree. You do not know all that I laid in that grave. As I sat there beside it, I told myself that henceforward I should always be alone in the world; that I had nothing left to hope for; that I should be again as I had been before, a poor lonely girl; that I should never more see a friendly light in any eyes. I stayed out there all through the night, praying God to have pity on me. When I went back to the highroad I saw a poor little child, about ten years old, who had no hands.

"'God has heard me,' I thought. I had prayed that night as I had never prayed before. 'I will take care of the poor little one; we will beg together, and I will be a mother to him. Two of us ought to do better than one; perhaps I shall have more courage for him than I have for myself.'

"At first the little boy seemed to be quite happy, and, indeed, he would have been hard to please if he had not been content. I did everything that he wanted, and gave him the best of all that I had; I was his slave in fact, and he tyrannized over me, but that was nicer than being alone, I used to think! Pshaw! no sooner did the little good-for-nothing know that I carried a twenty-franc piece sewed into my skirt-band than he cut the stitches, and stole my gold coin, the

price of my poor spaniel ! I had meant to have masses said with it. — A child without hands, too ! Oh, it makes one shudder ! Somehow that theft took all the heart out of me. It seemed as if I was to love nothing but it should come to some wretched end.

“ One day at Échelles, I watched a fine carriage coming slowly up the hillside. There was a young lady, as beautiful as the Virgin Mary, in the carriage, and a young man, who looked like the young lady. ‘ Just look,’ he said ; ‘ there is a pretty girl ! ’ and he flung a silver coin to me.

“ No one but you, M. Benassis, could understand how pleased I was with the compliment, the first that I had ever had ; but, indeed, the gentleman ought not to have thrown the money to me. I was all in a flutter ; I knew of a short cut, a footpath among the rocks, and started at once to run, so that I reached the summit of the Échelles long before the carriage, which was coming up very slowly. I saw the young man again ; he was quite surprised to find me there ; and as for me, I was so pleased that my heart seemed to be throbbing in my throat. Some kind of instinct drew me towards him. After he had recognized me, I went on my way again ; I felt quite sure that he and the young lady with him would leave the carriage to see the waterfall at Couz, and so they did. When they had alighted, they saw me once more, under the walnut trees by the wayside. They asked me many questions and seemed to take an interest in what I told them about myself. In all my life I had never heard such pleasant voices as they had, that handsome young man and his sister, for she was his sister I am sure. I thought about them for a whole year afterwards, and kept on hoping that they would come back. I would have given two years of my life only to see that traveler again, he looked so nice. Until I knew M. Benassis these were the greatest events of my life. Although my mistress turned me away for trying on that horrid ball-dress of hers, I was sorry for her, and I have forgiven her ; for,



candidly, if you will give me leave to say so, I thought myself the better woman of the two, countess though she was."

"Well," said Genestas, after a moment's pause, "you see that Providence has kept a friendly eye on you, you are in clover here."

At these words La Fosseuse looked at Benassis with eyes full of gratitude.

"Would that I were rich!" came from Genestas. The officer's exclamation was followed by profound silence.

"You owe me a story," said La Fosseuse at last, in coaxing tones.

"I will tell it at once," answered Genestas. "On the evening before the battle of Friedland," he went on, after a moment, "I had been sent with a despatch to General Davoust's quarters, and I was on the way back to my own, when at a turn in the road I found myself face to face with the Emperor. Napoleon gave me a look.

"'You are Captain Genestas, are you not?' he said.

"'Yes, your majesty.'

"'You were out in Egypt?'

"'Yes, your majesty.'

"'You had better not keep to the road you are on,' he said; 'turn to the left, you will reach your division sooner that way.'

"That was what the Emperor said, but you would never imagine how kindly he said it; and he had so many irons in the fire just then, for he was riding about surveying the position of the field. I am telling you this story to show you what a memory he had, and so that you may know that he knew my face. I took the oath in 1815. But for that mistake, perhaps I might have been a colonel to-day; I never meant to betray the Bourbons, France must be defended, and that was all I thought about. I was a major in the Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard; and although my wound still gave me trouble, I swung a sabre in the battle of Waterloo. When it

was all over, and Napoleon returned to Paris, I went too; then when he reached Rochefort, I followed him against his orders; it was some sort of comfort to watch over him and to see that no mishap befell him on the way. So when he was walking along the beach he turned and saw me on duty ten paces from him.

“‘Well, Genestas,” he said, as he came towards me, “so we are not yet dead, either of us?”

“It cut me to the heart to hear him say that. If you had heard him, you would have shuddered from head to foot, as I did. He pointed to the villainous English vessel that was keeping the entrance to the harbor. ‘When I see *that*,’ he said, ‘and think of my Guard, I wish that I had perished in that torrent of blood.’

“Yes,” said Genestas, looking at the doctor and at La Fosseuse, “those were his very words.”

“‘The generals who counseled you not to charge with the Guard, and who hurried you into your traveling carriage, were no true friends of yours,’ I said.

“‘Come with me,’ he cried eagerly, ‘the game is not ended yet.’

“‘I would gladly go with your majesty, but I am not free; I have a motherless child on my hands just now,’ I could but reply.

“And so it happened that Adrien over there prevented me from going to St. Helena.

“‘Stay,’ he said, ‘I have never given you anything. You are not one of those who fill one hand and then hold out the other. Here is the snuff-box that I have used through this last campaign. And stay on in France; after all, brave men are wanted there! Remain in the service, and keep me in remembrance. Of all my army in Egypt, you are the last that I have seen still on his legs in France.’ And he gave me a little snuff-box.

“‘Have “Honor and Country” engraved on it,’ he said; ‘the

history of our two last campaigns is summed up in those three words.'

"Then those who were going out with him came up, and I spent the rest of the morning with them. The Emperor walked to and fro along the beach; there was not a sign of agitation about him, though he frowned from time to time. At noon, it was considered hopeless for him to attempt to escape by sea. The English had found out that he was at Rochefort; he must either give himself up to them, or cross the breadth of France again. We were wretchedly anxious; the minutes seemed like hours! On the one hand there were the Bourbons, who would have shot Napoleon if he had fallen into their clutches; and on the other, the English, a dishonored race, they covered themselves with shame by flinging a foe who asked for hospitality away on a desert rock, that is a stain which they will never wash away. Whilst we were anxiously debating, some one or other among his suite presented a sailor to him, a Lieutenant Doret, who had a scheme for reaching America to lay before him. As a matter of fact, a brig from the States and a merchant vessel were lying in the harbor.

"'But how could you set about it, lieutenant?' the Emperor asked him.

"'You will be on board the merchant vessel, sire,' the man answered. 'I will run up the white flag and man the brig with a few devoted followers. We will tackle the English vessel, set fire to her, and board her, and you will get clear away.'

"'We will go with you!' I cried to the lieutenant. But Napoleon looked at us and said, 'Captain Genestas, keep yourself for France.'

"It was the only time I ever saw Napoleon show any emotion. With a wave of his hand to us he went in again. I watched him go on board the English vessel, and then I went away. It was all over with him, and he knew it. There

was a traitor in the harbor, who by means of signals gave warning to the Emperor's enemies of his presence. Then Napoleon fell back on a last resource; he did as he had been wont to do on the battlefield, he went to his foes instead of letting them come to him. Talk of troubles! No words could ever make you understand the misery of those who loved him for his own sake."

"But where is his snuff-box?" asked La Fosseuse.

"It is in a box at Grenoble," the commandant replied.

"I will go over to see it, if you will let me. To think that you have something in your possession that his fingers have touched!—Had he a well-shaped hand?"

"Very."

"Can it be true that he is dead? Come, tell me the real truth?"

"Yes, my dear child, he is dead; there is no doubt about it."

"I was such a little girl in 1815. I was not tall enough to see anything but his hat, and even so I was nearly crushed to death in the crowd at Grenoble."

"Your coffee and cream is very nice indeed," said Genestas. "Well, Adrien, how do you like this country? Will you come here to see mademoiselle?"

The boy made no answer; he seemed afraid to look at La Fosseuse. Benassis never took his eyes off Adrien; he appeared to be reading the lad's very soul.

"Of course he will come to see her," said Benassis. "But let us go home again, I have a pretty long round to make, and shall want a horse. I daresay you and Jacquotte will manage to get on together whilst I am away."

"Will you not come with us?" said Genestas to La Fosseuse.

"Willingly," she answered; "I have a lot of things to take over for Mme. Jacquotte."

They started out for the doctor's house. Her visitors had

raised La Fosseuse's spirits; she led the way along narrow tracks, through the loneliest yet most lovely parts of the hills.

"You have told us nothing about yourself, Monsieur l'Officier," she said. "I should have liked to hear you tell us about some adventure in the wars. I liked what you told us about Napoleon very much, but it made me feel sad.— If you would be so very kind——"

"Quite right!" Benassis exclaimed. "You ought to tell us about some thrilling adventure during our walk. Come, now, something really interesting, like that business of the beam in the Beresina!"

"So few of my recollections are worth telling," said Genestas. "Some people come in for all kinds of adventures, but I have never managed to be the hero of any story. Oh! stop a bit though, a funny thing did once happen to me. I was with the Grand Army in 1805, and so, of course, I was at Austerlitz. There was a good deal of skirmishing just before Ulm surrendered, which kept the cavalry pretty fully occupied. Moreover we were under the command of Murat, who never let the grass grow under his feet.

"I was still only a sub-lieutenant in those days. It was just at the opening of the campaign, and after one of these affairs, that we took possession of a district in which there were a good many fine estates; so it fell out that one evening my regiment bivouacked in a park belonging to a handsome château where a countess lived, a young and pretty woman she was. Of course, I meant to lodge in the house, and I hurried there to put a stop to pillage of any sort. I came into the salon just as my quartermaster was pointing his carbine at the countess, his brutal way of asking for what she certainly could not give the ugly scoundrel. I struck up his carbine with my sword, the bullet went through a looking-glass on the wall, then I dealt my gentleman a back-handed blow that stretched him on the floor. The sound of the shot

and the cries of the countess brought all her people on the scene, and it was my turn to be in danger.

“‘Stop!’ she cried in German (for they were going to run me through the body), ‘this officer has saved my life?’

“They drew back at that. The lady gave me her handkerchief (a fine embroidered handkerchief, which I have yet), telling me that her house would always be open to me, and that I should always find a sister and a devoted friend in her, if at any time I should be in any sort of trouble. In short, she did not know how to make enough of me. She was as fair as a wedding morning and as charming as a kitten. We had dinner together. Next day I was distractedly in love, but next day I had to be in my place at Güntzburg, or wherever it was. There was no help for it, I had to turn out, and started off with my handkerchief, much aggrieved over the turn affairs had taken.

“Well, we gave them battle, and all the time I kept on saying to myself, ‘I wish a bullet would come my way! *Mon Dieu!* they are flying thick enough!’

“I had no wish for a ball in the thigh, for I should have had to stop where I was in that case, and there would have been no going back to the château, but I was not particular; a nice wound in the arm I should have liked best, so that I might be nursed and made much of by the princess. I flung myself on the enemy, like mad; but I had no sort of luck, and came out of the action quite safe and sound. We must march, and there was an end of it; I never saw the countess again, and there is the whole story.”

By this time they had reached Benassis' house; the doctor mounted his horse at once and disappeared. Genestas recommended his son to Jacquotte's care, so the doctor on his return found that she had taken Adrien completely under her wing, and had installed him in M. Gravier's celebrated room. With no small astonishment, she heard her master's order to put up a simple camp-bed in his own room; for that the lad was to

sleep there, and this in such an authoritative tone, that for once in her life Jacquotte found not a single word to say.

After dinner the commandant went back to Grenoble. Benassis' reiterated assurances that the lad would soon be restored to health had taken a weight off his mind.

Eight months later, in the earliest days of the following December, Genestas was appointed to be lieutenant-colonel of a regiment stationed at Poitiers. He was just thinking of writing to Benassis to tell him of the journey he was about to take, when a letter came from the doctor. His friend told him that Adrien was once more in sound health.

"The boy has grown strong and tall," he said; "and he is wonderfully well. He has profited by Butifer's instruction since you saw him last, and is now as good a shot as our smuggler himself. He has grown brisk and active too; he is a good walker, and rides well; he is not in the least like the lad of sixteen who looked like a boy of twelve eight months ago; any one might think he was twenty years old. There is an air of self-reliance and independence about him. In fact, he is a man now, and you must begin to think about his future at once."

"I shall go over to Benassis to-morrow, of course," said Genestas to himself, "and I will see what he says before I make up my mind what to do with that fellow," and with that he went to a farewell dinner given to him by his brother officers. He would be leaving Grenoble now in a very few days.

As the lieutenant-colonel returned after the dinner, his servant handed him a letter. It had been brought by a messenger, he said, who had waited a long while for an answer.

Genestas recognized Adrien's handwriting although his

head was swimming after the toasts that had been drunk in his honor ; probably, he thought the letter merely contained a request to gratify some boyish whim, so he left it unopened on the table. The next morning, when the fumes of champagne had passed, he took it and began to read.

"My dear father——"

"Oh ! you young rogue," was his comment, "you know how to coax whenever you want something."

"Our dear M. Benassis is dead——"

The letter dropped from Genestas' hands ; it was some time before he could read any more.

"Every one is in consternation. The trouble is all the greater because it came as a sudden shock. It was so unexpected. M. Benassis seemed perfectly well the day before ; there was not a sign of ill-health about him. Only the day before yesterday he went to see all his patients, even those who lived farthest away ; it was as if he had known what was going to happen ; and he spoke to every one whom he met, saying, 'Good-bye my friends,' each time. Towards five o'clock he came back just as usual to have dinner with me. He was tired ; Jacquotte noticed the purple flush on his face, but the weather was so very cold that she would not get ready a warm foot-bath for him, as she usually did when she saw that the blood had gone to his head. So she has been wailing, poor thing, through her tears for these two days past, 'If I had *only* given him a foot-bath, he would be living now !'

"M. Benassis was hungry ; he made a good dinner. I thought he was in higher spirits than usual ; we both of us laughed a great deal, I had never seen him laugh so much before. After dinner, towards seven o'clock, a man came with a message from Saint Laurent du Pont ; it was a serious case, and M. Benassis was urgently needed. He said to me, 'I shall have to go, though I never care to set out on horseback when I have hardly digested my dinner, more especially when it is as cold as this. It is enough to kill a man !'



"For all that, he went. At nine o'clock the postman, Goguelat, brought a letter for M. Benassis. Jacquotte was tired out, for it was her washing-day. She gave me the letter and went off to bed. She begged me to keep a good fire in our bedroom, and to have some tea ready for M. Benassis when he came in, for I am still sleeping in the little cot-bed in his room. I raked out the fire in the salon, and went upstairs to wait for my good friend. I looked at the letter, out of curiosity, before I laid it on the chimney-piece, and noticed the handwriting and the postmark. It came from Paris, and I think it was a lady's hand. I am telling you about it because of things that happened afterwards.

"About ten o'clock, I heard the horse returning, and M. Benassis' voice. He said to Nicolle, 'It is cold enough to-night to bring the wolves out. I do not feel at all well.' Nicolle said, 'Shall I go up and wake Jacquotte?' And M. Benassis answered, 'Oh! no, no,' and came upstairs.

"I said, 'I have your tea here, all ready for you,' and he smiled at me in the way that you know, and said, 'Thank you, Adrien.' That was his last smile. In a moment he began to take off his cravat, as though he could not breathe. 'How hot it is in here!' he said, and flung himself down in an armchair. 'A letter has come for you, my good friend,' I said; 'here it is;' and I gave him the letter. He took it up and glanced at the handwriting. 'Ah! *mon Dieu!*' he exclaimed, 'perhaps she is free at last!' Then his head sank back and his hands shook. After a little while he set the lamp on the table and opened the letter. There was something so alarming in the cry he had given that I watched him while he read, and saw that his face was flushed, and there were tears in his eyes. Then quite suddenly he fell, head forwards. I tried to raise him, and saw how purple his face was.

"'It is all over with me,' he said, stammering; it was terrible to see how he struggled to rise. 'I must be bled;

bleed me!’ he cried, clutching my hand——‘Adrien,’ he said again, ‘burn this letter!’ He gave it to me, and I threw it on the fire. I called for Jacquotte and Nicolle. Jacquotte did not hear me, but Nicolle did, and came hurrying upstairs; he helped me to lay M. Benassis on my little bed. Our dear friend could not hear us any longer when we spoke to him, and although his eyes were open, he did not see anything. Nicolle galloped off at once to fetch the surgeon, M. Bordier, and in this way spread alarm through the town. It was all astir in a moment. M. Janvier, M. Dufau, and all the rest of your acquaintance were the first to come to us. But all hope was at an end, M. Benassis was dying fast. He gave no sign of consciousness, not even when M. Bordier cauterized the soles of his feet. It was an attack of gout, combined with an apoplectic stroke.

“I am giving you all these details, dear father, because I know how much you cared for him. As for me, I am very sad and full of grief, for I can say to you that I cared more for him than for any one else except you. I learned more from M. Benassis’ talk in the evenings than I ever could have learned at school.

“You cannot imagine the scene next morning when the news of his death was known in the place. The garden and the yard here were filled with people. How they sobbed and wailed! Nobody did any work that day. Every one recalled the last time that they had seen M. Benassis, and what he had said, or they talked of all that he had done for them; and those who were least overcome with grief spoke for the others. Every one wanted to see him once more, and the crowd grew larger every moment. The sad news traveled so fast that men and women and children came from ten leagues round; all the people in the district, and even beyond it, had that one thought in their minds.

“It was arranged that four of the oldest men of the commune should carry the coffin. It was a very difficult task for

them, for the crowd was so dense between the church and M. Benassis' house. There must have been nearly five thousand people there, and almost every one knelt as if the Host were passing. There was not nearly room for them in the church. In spite of their grief, the crowd was so silent that you could hear the sound of the bell during mass and the chanting as far as the end of the High Street; but when the procession started again for the new cemetery, which M. Benassis had given to the town, little thinking, poor man, that he himself would be the first to be buried there, a great cry went up. M. Janvier wept as he said the prayers; there were no dry eyes among the crowd. And so we buried him.

"As night came on the people dispersed, carrying sorrow and mourning everywhere with them. The next day Gondrin and Goguelat, and Butifer, with some others, set to work to raise a sort of pyramid of earth, twenty feet high, above the spot where M. Benassis lies; it is being covered now with green sods, and every one is helping them. These things, dear father, have all happened in three days.

"M. Dufau found M. Benassis' will lying open on the table where he used to write. When it was known how his property had been left, affection for him and regret for his loss became even deeper, if possible. And now, dear father, I am waiting for Butifer (who is taking this letter to you) to come back with your answer. You must tell me what I am to do. Will you come to fetch me, or shall I go to you at Grenoble? Tell me what you wish me to do, and be sure that I shall obey you in everything.

"Farewell, dear father, I send my love, and I am your affectionate son,  
ADRIEN GENESTAS."

"Ah! well, I must go over," the soldier exclaimed.

He ordered his horse and started out. It was one of those still December mornings when the sky is covered with gray clouds. The wind was too light to disperse the thick fog,

through which the bare trees and damp house fronts seemed strangely unfamiliar. The very silence was gloomy. There is such a thing as a silence full of light and gladness; on a bright day there is a certain joyousness about the slightest sound, but in such dreary weather nature is not silent, she is dumb. All sounds seemed to die away, stifled by the heavy air.

There was something in the gloom without him that harmonized with Colonel Genestas' mood; his heart was oppressed with grief, and thoughts of death filled his mind. Involuntarily he began to think of the cloudless sky on that lovely spring morning, and remembered how bright the valley had looked when he passed through it for the first time; and now, in strong contrast with that day, the heavy sky above him was a leaden gray, there was no greenness about the hills, which were still waiting for the cloak of winter snow that invests them with a certain beauty of its own. There was something painful in all this bleak and bare desolation for a man who was traveling to find a grave at his journey's end; the thought of that grave haunted him. The lines of dark pine-trees here and there along the mountain ridges against the sky seized on his imagination; they were in keeping with the officer's mournful musings. Every time that he looked over the valley that lay before him, he could not help thinking of the trouble that had befallen the canton, of the man who had died so lately, and of the blank left by his death.

Before long, Genestas reached the cottage where he had asked for a cup of milk on his first journey. The sight of the smoke rising above the hovel where the charity-children were being brought up recalled vivid memories of Benassis and of his kindness of heart. The officer made up his mind to call there. He would give some alms to the poor woman for his dead friend's sake. He tied his horse to a tree, and opened the door of the hut without knocking.

"Good-day, mother," he said, addressing the old woman,

who was sitting by the fire with the little ones crouching at her side. "Do you remember me?"

"Oh! quite well, sir! You came here one fine morning last spring and gave us two crowns."

"There, mother! that is for you and the children."

"Thank you kindly, sir. May heaven bless you!"

"You must not thank me, mother," said the officer; "it is all through M. Benassis that the money has come to you."

The old woman raised her eyes and gazed at Genestas.

"Ah! sir," she said, "he has left his property to our poor countryside, and made all of us his heirs; but we have lost him who was worth more than all, for it was he who made everything turn out well for us."

"Good-bye, mother! Pray for him," said Genestas, making a few playful cuts at the children with his riding whip.

The old woman and her little charges went out with him; they watched him mount his horse and ride away.

He followed the road along the valley until he reached the bridle-path that led to La Fosseuse's cottage. From the slope above the house he saw that the door was fastened and the shutters closed. In some anxiety he returned to the highway, and rode on under the poplars, now bare and leafless. Before long he overtook the old laborer, who was dressed in his Sunday best, and creeping slowly along the road. There was no bag of tools on his shoulder.

"Good-day, father Moreau!"

"Ah! good-day, sir,—I mind who you are now!" the old fellow exclaimed after a moment. "You are a friend of monsieur, our late mayor! Ah! sir, would it not have been far better if God had only taken a poor rheumatic old creature like me instead? It would not have mattered if He had taken me, but *he* was the light of our eyes."

"Do you know how it is that there is no one at home up there at La Fosseuse's cottage?"

The old man gave a look at the sky.

"What time is it, sir? The sun has not shone all day," he said.

"It is ten o'clock."

"Oh! well, then, she will have gone to mass or else to the cemetery. She goes there every day. He has left her five hundred livres a year and her house for as long as she lives, but his death has fairly turned her brain, as you may say——"

"And where are you going, father Moreau?"

"Little Jacques is to be buried to-day, and I am going to the funeral. He was my nephew, poor little chap; he had been ailing a long while, and he died yesterday morning. It really looked as though it was M. Benassis who kept him alive. That is the way! All these younger ones die!" Moreau added, half-jestingly, half-sadly.

Genestas reined in his horse as he entered the town, for he met Gondrin and Goguelat, each carrying a pickaxe and shovel. He called to them, "Well, old comrades, we have had the misfortune to lose him——"

"There, there, that is enough, sir!" interrupted Goguelat, "we know that well enough. We have just been cutting turf to cover his grave."

"His life will make a grand story to tell, eh?" remarked Genestas as they proceeded along.

"Yes," answered Goguelat, "he was the Napoleon of our valley, barring the battles."

As they reached the parsonage, Genestas saw a little group about the door; Butifer and Adrien were talking with M. Janvier, who, no doubt, had just returned from saying mass. Seeing that the officer made as though he were about to dismount, Butifer promptly went to hold the horse, while Adrien sprang forward and flung his arms about his father's neck. Genestas was deeply touched by the boy's affection, though no sign of this appeared in the soldier's words or manner.

"Why, Adrien," he said, "you certainly are set up again. My goodness! Thanks to our poor friend, you have almost

grown into a man. I shall not forget your tutor here, Master Butifer."

"Oh! colonel," entreated Butifer, "take me away from here and put me into your regiment. I cannot trust myself now that M. le Maire is gone. *He* wanted me to go for a soldier, didn't he? Well, then, I will do what he wished. He told you all about me, and you will not be hard on me, will you, M. Genestas?"

"Right, my fine fellow," said Genestas, as he struck his hand in the other's. "I will find something to suit you, set your mind at rest—— And how is it with you, M. le Curé!"

"Well, like everyone else in the canton, colonel, I feel sorrow for his loss, but no one knows as I do how irreparable it is. He was like an angel of God among us. Fortunately, he did not suffer at all; it was a painless death. The hand of God gently loosed the bonds of a life that was one continual blessing to us all."

"Will it be intrusive if I ask you to accompany me to the cemetery? I should like to bid him farewell, as it were."

Genestas and the curé, still in conversation, walked on together. Butifer and Adrien followed them at a few paces distance. They went in the direction of the little lake, and as soon as they were clear of the town, the lieutenant-colonel saw on the mountain side a large piece of waste land enclosed by walls.

"That is the cemetery," the curé told him. "He is the first to be buried in it. Only three months before he was brought here, it struck him that it was a very bad arrangement to have the churchyard round the church; so, in order to carry out the law, which prescribes that burial grounds should be removed to a stated distance from human dwellings, he himself gave this piece of land to the commune. We are burying a child, poor little thing, in the new cemetery to-day, so we

shall have begun by laying innocence and virtue there. Can it be that death is after all a reward? Did God mean it as a lesson for us when he took these two perfect natures to Himself? When we have been tried and disciplined in youth by pain, in later life by mental suffering, are we so much the nearer to Him? Look! there is the rustic monument which has been erected to his memory."

Genestas saw a mound of earth about twenty feet high. It was bare as yet, but dwellers in the district were already busy covering the sloping sides with green turf. La Fosseuse, her face buried in her hands, was sobbing bitterly; she was sitting on the pile of stones in which they had planted a great wooden cross, made from the trunk of a pine tree, from which the bark had not been removed. The officer read the inscription; the letters were large, and had been deeply cut in the wood:

D. O. M.

HERE LIES

### THE GOOD MONSIEUR BENASSIS

THE FATHER OF US ALL

PRAY FOR HIM.

"Was it you, sir," asked Genestas, "who——?"

"No," answered the curé; "it is simply what is said everywhere, from the heights up there above us down to Grenoble, so the words have been carved here."

Genestas remained silent for a few moments. Then he moved from where he stood and came nearer to La Fosseuse, who did not hear him, and spoke again to the curé.

"As soon as I have my pension," he said, "I will come to finish my days here among you."





# THE COMMISSION IN LUNACY.

(*L'Interdiction.*)

Translated by CLARA BELL.

*Dedicated to Monsieur le Contre-Amiral Bazoche, Governor  
of the Isle of Bourbon, by the grateful writer,*

*De Balzac.*

IN 1828, at about one o'clock one morning, two persons came out of a large house in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, near the Elysée-Bourbon. One was a famous doctor, Horace Bianchon; the other was one of the most elegant men in Paris, the Baron de Rastignac; they were friends of long standing. Each had sent away his carriage, and no cab was to be seen in the street; but the night was fine, and the pavement dry.

"We will walk as far as the Boulevard," said Eugène de Rastignac to Bianchon. "You can get a hackney cab at the club; there is always one to be found there till daybreak. Come with me as far as my house."

"With pleasure."

"Well, and what have you to say about it?"

"About that woman?" said the doctor coldly.

"There I recognize my Bianchon!" exclaimed Rastignac.

"Why, how?"

"Well, my dear fellow, you speak of the Marquise d'Espard as if she were a case for your hospital."

"Do you want to know what I think, Eugène? If you throw over Madame de Nucingen for this Marquise, you will swap a one-eyed horse for a blind one."

"Madame de Nucingen is six-and-thirty, Bianchon."

"And this woman is three-and-thirty," said the doctor.

(283)

"Her worst enemies only say six-and-twenty."

"My dear boy, when you really want to know a woman's age, look at her temples and the tip of her nose. Whatever women may achieve with their cosmetics, they can do nothing against those incorruptible witnesses to their experiences. There each year of life has left its stigmata. When a woman's temples are flaccid, seamed, withered in a particular way; when at the tip of her nose you see those minute specks, which look like the imperceptible black smuts which are shed in London by the chimneys in which coal is burnt—Your servant, sir! That woman is more than thirty. She may be handsome, witty, loving—whatever you please, but she is past thirty, she is arriving at maturity. I do not blame men who attach themselves to that kind of woman; only a man of your superior distinction must not mistake a winter pippin for a little summer apple, smiling on the bough, and waiting for you to crunch it. Love never goes to study the registers of birth and marriage; no one loves a woman because she is handsome or ugly, stupid or clever; we love because we love."

"Well, for my part, I love for quite other reasons. She is Marquise d'Espard; she was a Blamont-Chauvry; she is the fashion; she has soul; her foot is as pretty as the Duchesse de Berri's; she has perhaps a hundred thousand francs a year—some day, perhaps, I may marry her! In short, she will put me into a position which will enable me to pay my debts."

"I thought you were rich," interrupted Bianchon.

"Bah! I have twenty thousand francs a year—just enough to keep up my stables. I was thoroughly done, my dear fellow, in that Nucingen business; I will tell you about that. I have got my sisters married; that is the clearest profit I can show since we last met; and I would rather have them provided for than have five hundred thousand francs a year. Now, what would you have me do? I am ambitious. To what can Madame de Nucingen lead? A year more and I shall be shelved, stuck in a pigeon-hole like a married man. I have

all the discomforts of marriage and of single life, without the advantages of either; a false position, to which every man must come who remains tied too long to the same apron-string."

"So you think you will come upon a treasure here?" said Bianchon. "Your Marquise, my dear fellow, does not hit my fancy at all."

"Your liberal opinions blur your eyesight. If Madame d'Espard were a Madame Rabourdin——"

"Listen to me. Noble or simple, she would still have no soul; she would still be a perfect type of selfishness. Take my word for it, medical men are accustomed to judge of people and things; the sharpest of us read the soul while we study the body. In spite of that pretty boudoir where we have spent this evening, in spite of the magnificence of the house, it is quite possible that Madame la Marquise is in debt."

"What makes you think so?"

"I do not assert it; I am supposing. She talked of her soul as Louis XVIII. used to talk of his heart. I tell you this: That fragile, fair woman, with her chestnut hair, who pities herself that she may be pitied, enjoys an iron constitution, an appetite like a wolf's, and the strength and cowardice of a tiger. Gauze, and silk, and muslin were never more cleverly twisted round a lie! *Ecco.*"

"Bianchon, you frighten me! You have learned a good many things, then, since we lived in the Maison Vauquer?"

"Yes; since then, my boy, I have seen puppets, both dolls and mannikins. I know something of the ways of the fine ladies whose bodies we attend to, saving that which is dearest to them, their child—if they love it—or their pretty faces, which they always worship. A man spends his nights by their pillow, wearing himself to death to spare them the slightest loss of beauty in any part; he succeeds, he keeps their secret like the dead; they send to ask for his bill, and think it horribly

exorbitant. Who saved them? Nature. Far from recommending him, they speak ill of him, fearing lest he should become the physician of their best friends.

"My dear fellow, those women of whom you say, 'They are angels!' I—I—have seen stripped of the little grimaces under which they hide their soul, as well as of the frippery under which they disguise their defects—without manners and without stays; they are not beautiful.

"We saw a great deal of mud, a great deal of dirt, under the waters of the world when we were aground for a time on the shoals of the Maison Vauquer. What we saw there was nothing. Since I have gone into higher society, I have seen monsters dressed in satin, Michonneaus in white gloves, Poirets bedizened with orders, fine gentlemen doing more usurious business than old Gobseck! To the shame of mankind, when I have wanted to shake hands with Virtue, I have found her shivering in a loft, persecuted by calumny, half-starving on an income or a salary of fifteen hundred francs a year, and regarded as crazy, or eccentric, or imbecile.

"In short, my dear boy, the Marquise is a woman of fashion, and I have a particular horror of that kind of woman. Do you want to know why? A woman who has a lofty soul, fine taste, gentle wit, a generously warm heart, and who lives a simple life, has not a chance of being the fashion. *Ergo*: A woman of fashion and a man in power are analogous; but there is this difference: the qualities by which a man raises himself above others ennoble him and are a glory to him; whereas the qualities by which a woman gains power for a day are hideous vices; she belies her nature to hide her character, and to live the militant life of the world she must have iron strength under a frail appearance.

"I, as a physician, know that a sound stomach includes a good heart. Your woman of fashion feels nothing; her rage for pleasure has its source in a longing to heat up her cold nature, a craving for excitement and enjoyment, like an old

man who stands night after night by the footlights at the opera. As she has more brain than heart, she sacrifices genuine passion and true friends to her triumph, as a general sends his most devoted subalterns to the front in order to win a battle. The woman of fashion ceases to be a woman ; she is neither mother, nor wife, nor lover. She is, medically speaking, sex in the brain. And your Marquise, too, has all the characteristics of her monstrosity, the beak of a bird of prey, the clear, cold eye, the gentle voice—she is as polished as the steel of a machine, she touches everything except the heart."

"There is some truth in what you say, Bianchon."

"Some truth?" replied Bianchon. "It is all true. Do you suppose that I was not struck to the heart by the insulting politeness by which she made me measure the imaginary distance which her noble birth sets between us? That I did not feel the deepest pity for her cat-like civilities when I remembered what her object was? A year hence she will not write one word to do me the slightest service, and this evening she pelted me with smiles, believing that I can influence my uncle Popinot, on whom the success of her case——"

"Would you rather she should have played the fool with you, my dear fellow? I accept your diatribe against women of fashion ; but you are beside the mark. I should always prefer for a wife a Marquise d'Espard to the most devout and devoted creature on earth. Marry an angel! you would have to go and bury your happiness in the depths of the country! The wife of a politician is a governing machine, a contrivance that makes compliments and courtesies. She is the most important and most faithful tool which an ambitious man can use ; a friend, in short, who may compromise herself without mischief, and whom he may belie without harmful results. Fancy Mahomet in Paris in the nineteenth century! His wife would be a Rohan, a Duchesse de Chevreuse of the Fronde, as keen and as flattering as an Ambassadress, as wily

as Figaro. Your loving wives lead nowhere; a woman of the world leads to everything; she is the diamond with which a man cuts every window when he has not the golden key which unlocks every door. Leave humdrum virtues to the humdrum, ambitious vices to the ambitious.

"Besides, my dear fellow, do you imagine that the love of a Duchesse de Langeais, or de Maufrigneuse, or of a Lady Dudley does not bestow immense pleasure? If only you knew how much value the cold, severe style of such women gives to the smallest evidence of their affection! What a delight it is to see a periwinkle piercing through the snow! A smile from below a fan contradicts the reserve of an assumed attitude, and is worth all the unbridled tenderness of your middle-class women with their mortgaged devotion; for, in love, devotion is nearly akin to speculation.

"And, then, a woman of fashion, a Blamont-Chauvry, has her virtues too! Her virtues are fortune, power, effect, a certain contempt of all that is beneath her——"

"Thank you!" said Bianchon.

"Old curmudgeon!" said Rastignac, laughing. "Come—do not be common; do like your friend Desplein; be a Baron, a Knight of Saint Michael; become a peer of France, and marry your daughters to dukes."

"I! May the five hundred thousand devils——"

"Come, come! Can you be superior only in medicine? Really, you distress me——"

"I hate that sort of people; I long for a revolution to deliver us from them for ever."

"And so, my dear Robespierre of the lancet, you will not go to-morrow to your uncle Popinot?"

"Yes, I will," said Bianchon; "for you I would go to hell to fetch water——"

"My good friend, you really touch me. I have sworn that a commission shall sit on the Marquis. Why, here is even a long-saved tear to thank you."

"But," Bianchon went on, "I do not promise to succeed as you wish with Jean-Jules Popinot. You do not know him. However, I will take him to see your Marquise the day after to-morrow; she may get round him if she can. I doubt it. If all the truffles, all the Duchesses, all the mistresses, and all the charmers in Paris were there in the full bloom of their beauty; if the King promised him the peerage, and the Almighty gave him the Order of Paradise with the revenues of Purgatory, not one of all these powers would induce him to transfer a single straw from one saucer of his scales into the other. He is a judge, as Death is Death."

The two friends had reached the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines.

"Here you are at home," said Bianchon, laughing, as he pointed to the ministerial residence. "And here is my carriage," he added, calling a hackney cab. "And these—express our fortune."

"You will be happy at the bottom of the sea, while I am still struggling with the tempests on the surface, till I sink and go to ask you for a corner in your grotto, old fellow!"

"Till Saturday," replied Bianchon.

"Agreed," said Rastignac. "And you promise me Popinot?"

"I will do all my conscience will allow. Perhaps this appeal for a commission covers some little dramorama, to use a word of our good bad times."

"Poor Bianchon! he will never be anything but a good fellow," said Rastignac to himself as the cab drove off.

"Rastignac has given me the most difficult negotiation in the world," said Bianchon to himself, remembering, as he rose next morning, the delicate commission intrusted to him. "However, I have never asked the smallest service from my uncle in court, and have paid more than a thousand visits



gratis for him. And, after all, we are not apt to mince matters between ourselves. He will say Yes or No, and there is an end."

After this little soliloquy the famous physician bent his steps, at seven in the morning, towards the Rue du Fouarre, where dwelt Monsieur Jean-Jules Popinot, Judge of the Lower Court of the Department of the Seine. The Rue du Fouarre—an old word meaning straw—was in the thirteenth century the most important street in Paris. There stood the Schools of the University, where the voices of Abelard and of Gerson were heard in the world of learning. It is now one of the dirtiest streets of the Twelfth Arrondissement, the poorest quarter of Paris, that in which two-thirds of the population lack firing in winter, which leaves most brats at the gate of the Foundling Hospital, which sends most beggars to the poorhouse, most rag-pickers to the street corners, most decrepit old folks to bask against the walls on which the sun shines, most delinquents to the police courts.

Half-way down this street, which is always damp, and where the gutter carries to the Seine the blackened waters from some dye-works, there is an old house, restored no doubt under Francis I., and built of bricks held together by a few courses of masonry. That it is substantial seems proved by the shape of its front wall, not uncommonly seen in some parts of Paris. It bellies, so to speak, in a manner caused by the protuberance of its first floor, crushed under the weight of the second and third, but upheld by the strong wall of the ground floor. At first sight it would seem as though the piers between the windows, though strengthened by the stone mullions, must give way; but the observer presently perceives that, as in the tower at Bologna, the old bricks and old time-eaten stone of this house persistently preserve their centre of gravity.

At every season of the year the solid piers of the ground floor have the yellow tone and the imperceptible sweating surface that moisture gives to stone. The passer-by feels chilled

as he walks close to this wall, where worn corner-stones ineffectually shelter him from the wheels of vehicles. As is always the case in houses built before carriages were in use, the vault of the doorway forms a very low archway not unlike the barbican of a prison. To the right of this entrance are three windows, protected outside by iron gratings of so close a pattern that the curious cannot possibly see the use made of the dark, damp rooms within, and the panes too are dirty and dusty; to the left are two similar windows, one of which is sometimes open, exposing to view the porter, his wife and his children; swarming, working, cooking, eating, and screaming, in a floored and wainscoted room where everything is dropping to pieces, and into which you descend two steps—a depth which seems to suggest the gradual elevation of the soil of Paris.

If on a rainy day some foot-passenger takes refuge under the long vault, with projecting lime-washed beams, which leads from the door to the staircase, he will hardly fail to pause and look at the picture presented by the interior of this house. To the left is a square garden-plot, allowing of not more than four long steps in each direction, a garden of black soil, with trellises bereft of vines, and where, in default of vegetation, under the shade of two trees, papers collect, old rags, potsherds, bits of mortar fallen from the roof; a barren ground, where time has shed on the walls, and on the trunks and branches of the trees, a powdery deposit like cold soot. The two parts of the house, set at a right angle, derive light from this garden-court shut in by two adjoining houses built on wooden piers, decrepit and ready to fall, where on each floor some grotesque evidence is to be seen of the craft pursued by the lodger within. Here long poles are hung with immense skeins of dyed worsted put out to dry; there on ropes dance clean-washed shirts; higher up, on a shelf, volumes display their freshly-marbled edges; women sing, husbands whistle, children shout; the carpenter saws his planks, a copper turner

makes the metal screech ; all kinds of industries combine to produce a noise which the number of instruments renders distracting.

The general system of decoration in this passage, which is neither courtyard, garden, nor vaulted way, though a little of all, consists of wooden pillars resting on square stone blocks, and forming arches. Two archways open on to the little garden ; two others, facing the front gateway, lead to a wooden staircase, with an iron balustrade that was once a miracle of smith's work, so whimsical are the shapes given to the metal ; the worn steps creak under every tread. The entrance to each flat has an architrave dark with dirt, grease, and dust, and outer doors, covered with Utrecht velvet set with brass nails, once gilt, in a diamond pattern. These relics of splendor show that in the time of Louis XIV. the house was the residence of some Councilor to the Parlement, some rich priests, or some treasurer of the ecclesiastical revenue. But these vestiges of former luxury bring a smile to the lips by the artless contrast of past and present.

M. Jean-Jules Popinot lived on the first floor of this house, where the gloom, natural to all first floors in Paris houses, was increased by the narrowness of the street. This old tenement was known to all the Twelfth Arrondissement, on which Providence had bestowed this lawyer, as it gives a beneficent plant to cure or alleviate every malady. Here is a sketch of the man whom the brilliant Marquise d'Espard hoped to fascinate.

M. Popinot, as is seemly for a magistrate, was always dressed in black—a style which contributed to make him ridiculous in the eyes of those who were in the habit of judging everything from a superficial examination. Men who are jealous of maintaining the dignity required by this color ought to devote themselves to constant and minute care of their person ; but our dear M. Popinot was incapable of forcing himself to the puritanical cleanliness which black demands. His

trousers, always threadbare, looked like camlet—the stuff of which attorneys' gowns are made; and his habitual stoop set them, in time, in such innumerable creases that in places they were traced with lines, whitish, rusty, or shiny, betraying either sordid avarice or the most unheeding poverty. His coarse worsted stockings were twisted anyhow in his ill-shaped shoes. His linen had the tawny tinge acquired by long sojourn in a wardrobe, showing that the late lamented Madame Popinot had had a mania for much linen; in the Flemish fashion, perhaps, she had given herself the trouble of a great wash no more than twice a year. The old man's coat and waistcoat were in harmony with his trousers, shoes, stockings, and linen. He always had the luck of his carelessness; for, the first day he put on a new coat, he unfailingly matched it with the rest of his costume by staining it with incredible promptitude. The good man waited till his housekeeper told him that his hat was too shabby before buying a new one. His necktie was always crumpled and starchless, and he never set his dog's-eared shirt collar straight after his judge's bands had disordered it. He took no care of his gray hair, and shaved but twice a week. He never wore gloves, and generally kept his hands stuffed into his empty trousers' pockets; the soiled pocket-holes, almost always torn, added a final touch to the slovenliness of his person.

Any one who knows the Palais de Justice at Paris, where every variety of black attire may be studied, can easily imagine the appearance of M. Popinot. The habit of sitting for days at a time modifies the structure of the body, just as the fatigue of hearing interminable pleadings tells on the expression of a magistrate's face. Shut up as he is in courts ridiculously small, devoid of architectural dignity, and where the air is quickly vitiated, a Paris judge inevitably acquires a countenance puckered and seamed by reflection, and depressed by weariness; his complexion turns pallid, acquiring an earthy or greenish hue according to his individual temperament. In

short, within a given time the most blooming young man is turned into an "inasmuch" machine—an instrument which applies the Code to individual cases with the indifference of clock-work.

Hence, nature having bestowed on M. Popinot a not too pleasing exterior, his life as a lawyer had not improved it. His frame was graceless and angular. His thick knees, huge feet, and broad hands formed a contrast with a priest-like face having a vague resemblance to a calf's head, meek to unmeaningness, and but little brightened by divergent, bloodless eyes, divided by a straight flat nose, surmounted by a flat forehead, flanked by enormous ears, flabby and graceless. His thin, weak hair showed the baldness through various irregular partings.

One feature only commended this face to the physiognomist. This man had a mouth to whose lips divine kindness lent its sweetness. They were wholesome, full, red lips, finely wrinkled, sinuous, mobile, by which nature had given expression to noble feeling; lips which spoke to the heart and proclaimed the man's intelligence and lucidity, a gift of second sight, and a heavenly temper; and you would have judged him wrongly from looking merely at his sloping forehead, his fireless eyes and his shambling gait. His life answered to his countenance; it was full of secret labor, and hid the virtue of a saint. His superior knowledge of law proved so strong a recommendation at the time when Napoleon was reorganizing it in 1808 and 1811, that, by the advice of Cambacérès, he was one of the first men named to sit on the Imperial High Court of Justice at Paris. Popinot was no schemer. Whenever any demand was made, any request preferred for an appointment, the Minister would overlook Popinot, who never set foot in the house of the High Chancellor or the Chief Justice. From the High Court he was sent down to the Common Court, and pushed to the lowest rung of the ladder by active struggling men. There he was appointed supernumerary judge. There

was a general outcry among the lawyers: "Popinot a supernumerary!" Such injustice struck the legal world with dismay—the attorneys, the registrars, everybody but Popinot himself, who made no complaint. The first clamor over, everybody was satisfied that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds, which must certainly be the legal world. Popinot remained supernumerary judge till the day when the most famous Great Seal under the Restoration avenged the oversights heaped on this modest and uncomplaining man by the Chief Justices of the Empire. After being a supernumerary for twelve years, M. Popinot would no doubt die a puisne judge of the Court of the Seine.

To account for the obscure fortunes of one of the superior men of the legal profession, it is necessary to enter here into some details which will serve to reveal his life and character, and which will, at the same time, display some of the wheels of the great machine known as Justice. M. Popinot was classed by the three presidents who successively controlled the Court of the Seine under the category of possible judges, the stuff of which judges are made. Thus classified, he did not achieve the reputation for capacity which his previous labors had deserved. Just as a painter is invariably included in a category as a landscape painter, a portrait painter, a painter of history, of sea pieces, or of genre, by a public consisting of artists, connoisseurs, and simpletons, who, out of envy, or critical omnipotence, or prejudice, fence in his intellect, assuming, one and all, that there are ganglions in every brain—a narrow judgment which the world applies to writers, to statesmen, to everybody who begins with some specialty before being hailed as omniscient—so Popinot's fate was sealed, and he was hedged round to do a particular kind of work. Magistrates, attorneys, pleaders, all who pasture on the legal common, distinguish two elements in every case—law and equity. Equity is the outcome of facts, law is the application of principles to facts. A man may be right in equity but

wrong in law, without any blame to the judge. Between his conscience and the facts there is a whole gulf of determining reasons unknown to the judge, but which condemn or legitimize the act. A judge is not God ; his duty is to adapt facts to principles, to judge cases of infinite variety while measuring them by a fixed standard.

France employs about six thousand judges ; no generation has six thousand great men at her command, much less can she find them in the legal profession. Popinot, in the midst of the civilization of Paris, was just a very clever cadi, who, by the character of his mind, and by dint of rubbing the letter of the law into the essence of facts, had learned to see the error of spontaneous and violent decisions. By the help of his judicial second-sight he could pierce the double casing of lies in which advocates hide the heart of a trial. He was a judge, as the great Desplein was a surgeon ; he probed men's consciences as the anatomist probed their bodies. His life and habits had led him to an exact appreciation of their most secret thoughts by a thorough study of facts.

He sifted a case as Cuvier sifted the earth's crust. Like that great thinker, he proceeded from deduction to deduction before drawing his conclusions, and reconstructed the past career of a conscience as Cuvier reconstructed an Anoplotherium. When considering a brief he would often wake in the night, startled by a gleam of truth suddenly sparkling in his brain. Struck by the deep injustice, which is the end of these contests, in which everything is against the honest man, everything to the advantage of the rogue, he often summed up in favor of equity against law in such cases as bore on questions of what may be termed divination. Hence he was regarded by his colleagues as a man not of a practical mind ; his arguments on two lines of deduction made their deliberations lengthy. When Popinot observed their dislike to listening to him he gave his opinion briefly ; it was said that he was not a good judge in this class of cases ; but as his gift of

discrimination was remarkable, his opinion lucid, and his penetration profound, he was considered to have a special aptitude for the laborious duties of an examining judge. So an examining judge he remained during the greater part of his legal career.

Although his qualifications made him eminently fitted for its difficult functions, and he had the reputation of being so learned in criminal law that his duty was a pleasure to him, the kindness of his heart constantly kept him in torture, and he was nipped as in a vise between his conscience and his pity. The services of an examining judge are better paid than those of a judge in civil actions, but they do not therefore prove a temptation; they are too onerous. Popinot, a man of modest and virtuous learning, without ambition, an indefatigable worker, never complained of his fate; he sacrificed his tastes and his compassionate soul to the public good, and allowed himself to be transported to the noisome pools of criminal examinations, where he showed himself alike severe and beneficent. His clerk sometimes would give the accused some money to buy tobacco, or a warm winter garment, as he led him back from the judge's office to the *Souricière*, the mouse-trap—the House of Detention where the accused are kept under the orders of the Examining Judge. He knew how to be an inflexible judge and a charitable man. And in one extracted a confession so easily as he without recourse to judicial trickery. He had, too, all the faults of an observer. This man, apparently so fond of children, so untroubled, simple, and absent-minded, so unassuming. There was nothing of a prison wag, unmask crowd was so dense that the subdued a scoundrel. Unassuming strewed straw on the wet his perspicacity; but trenches were as polished as varnished domestic history, front of a man's shoulders the wall had a the man: another, ribable color, given to it by the rags and

Twelve years of these poor creatures. The poor wretches during the ter-



the stay in France of the so-called Allies, Popinot was appointed President of the Commission Extraordinary formed to distribute food to the poor of his neighborhood, just when he had planned to move from the Rue du Fouarre, which he as little liked to live in as his wife did. The great lawyer, the clear-sighted criminal judge, whose superiority seemed to his colleagues a form of aberration, had for five years been watching legal results without seeing their causes. As he scrambled up into lofts, as he saw the poverty, as he studied the desperate necessities which gradually bring the poor to criminal acts, as he estimated their long struggles, compassion filled his soul. The judge then became the Saint Vincent de Paul of these grown-up children, these suffering toilers. The transformation was not immediately complete. Beneficence has its temptations as vice has. Charity consumes a saint's purse, as roulette consumes the possessions of a gambler, quite gradually. Popinot went from misery to misery, from charity to charity; then, by the time he had lifted all the rags which cover public pauperism, like a bandage under which an inflamed wound lies festering, at the end of a year he had become the Providence incarnate of that quarter of the town.

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tues so splendid that they necessitate obscurity ; men make haste to hide them under a bushel. As to those whom the lawyer succored, they, hard at work all day and tired at night, were little able to sing his praises ; theirs was the gracelessness of children, who can never pay because they owe too much. There is such compulsory ingratitude ; but what heart that has sown good to reap gratitude can think itself great ?

By the end of the second year of his apostolic work, Popinot had turned the storeroom at the bottom of his house into a parlor, lighted by the three iron-barred windows. The walls and ceiling of this spacious room were whitewashed, and the furniture consisted of wooden benches like those seen in schools, a clumsy cupboard, a walnut-wood writing-table, and an armchair. In the cupboard were his registers of donations, his tickets for orders for bread, and his diary. He kept his ledger like a tradesman, that he might not be ruined by kindness. All the sorrows of the neighborhood were entered and numbered in a book, where each had its little account, as merchants' customers have theirs. When there was any question as to a man or a family needing help, the lawyer could always command information from the police.

Lavienne, a man made for his master, was his aide-de-camp. He redeemed or renewed pawn-tickets, and visited the districts most threatened with famine, while his master was in court.

From four till seven in the morning in summer, from six till nine in winter, this room was full of women, children, and paupers, while Popinot gave audience. There was no need for a stove in winter ; the crowd was so dense that the air was warmed ; only Lavienne strewed straw on the wet floor. By long use the benches were as polished as varnished mahogany ; at the height of a man's shoulders the wall had a coat of dark, indescribable color, given to it by the rags and tattered clothes of these poor creatures. The poor wretches

loved Popinot so well that when they assembled before his door was opened, before daybreak on a winter's morning, the women warming themselves with their foot-brasiers, the men swinging their arms for circulation, never a sound had disturbed his sleep. Rag-pickers and other toilers of the night knew the house, and often saw a light burning in the lawyer's private room at unholy hours. Even thieves, as they passed by, said, "That is his house," and respected it. The morning he gave to the poor, the mid-day hours to criminals, the evening to law work.

Thus the gift of observation that characterized Popinot was necessarily *bifrons*; he could guess the virtues of a pauper—good feelings nipped, fine actions in embryo, unrecognized self-sacrifice, just as he could read at the bottom of a man's conscience the faintest outlines of a crime, the slenderest threads of wrongdoing, and infer all the rest.

Popinot's inherited fortune was a thousand crowns a year. His wife, sister to M. Bianchon, senior, a doctor at Sancerre, had brought him about twice as much. She, dying five years since, had left her fortune to her husband. As the salary of a supernumerary judge is not large, and Popinot had been a fully salaried judge only for four years, we may guess his reasons for parsimony in all that concerned his person and mode of life, when we consider how small his means were and how great his beneficence. Besides, is not such indifference to dress as stamped Popinot an absent-minded man, a distinguishing mark of scientific attainment, of art passionately pursued, of a perpetually active mind? To complete this portrait, it will be enough to add that Popinot was also one of the few judges of the Court of the Seine on whom the distinguishing ribbon of the Legion of Honor had not been conferred.

Such was the man who had been instructed by the President of the Second Chamber of the Court—to which Popinot had belonged since his reinstatement among the judges in civil

law—to examine the Marquis d'Espard at the request of his wife, who sued for a Commission in Lunacy.

The Rue du Fouarre, where so many unhappy wretches swarmed in the early morning, would be deserted by nine o'clock, and as gloomy and squalid as ever. Bianchon put his horse to a trot in order to find his uncle in the midst of his business. It was not without a smile that he thought of the curious contrast the judge's appearance would make in Madame d'Espard's room; but he promised himself that he would persuade him to dress in a way that should not be too ridiculous.

"If only my uncle happens to have a new coat!" said Bianchon to himself, as he turned into the Rue du Fouarre, where a pale light shone from the parlor windows. "I shall do well, I believe, to talk that over with Lavienne."

At the sound of wheels half a score of startled paupers came out from under the gateway, and took off their hats on recognizing Bianchon; for the doctor, who treated gratuitously the sick recommended to him by the lawyer, was not less well known than he to the poor creatures assembled there.

Bianchon found his uncle in the middle of the parlor, where the benches were occupied by patients presenting such grotesque singularities of costume as would have made the least artistic passer-by turn round to gaze at them. A draughtsman—a Rembrandt, if there were one in our day—might have conceived of one of his finest compositions from seeing these children of misery, in artless attitudes, and all silent.

Here was the rugged countenance of an old man with a white beard and an apostolic head—a Saint Peter ready to hand; his chest, partly uncovered, showed salient muscles, the evidence of an iron constitution which had served him as a fulcrum to resist a whole poem of sorrows. There a young woman was suckling her youngest-born to keep it from crying, while another of about five stood between her knees. Her

white bosom, gleaming amid rags, the baby with its transparent flesh-tints, and the brother, whose attitude promised a street arab in the future, touched the fancy with pathos by its almost graceful contrast with the long row of faces crimson with cold, in the midst of which sat this family group. Further away, an old woman, pale and rigid, had the repulsive look of rebellious pauperism, eager to avenge all its past woes in one day of violence.

There, again, ~~was~~ the young workman, weakly and indolent, whose brightly intelligent eye revealed fine faculties crushed by necessity struggled with in vain, saying nothing of his sufferings, and nearly dead for lack of an opportunity to squeeze between the bars of the vast stews where the wretched swim round and round and devour each other.

The majority were women; their husbands, gone to their work, left it to ~~them~~, no doubt, to plead the cause of the family, with the ingenuity which characterizes the woman of the people, who is almost always queen in her hovel. You would have seen a torn bandana on every head, on every form a skirt deep in mud; ragged kerchiefs, worn and dirty jackets, ~~but~~ eyes that burnt like live coals. It was a horrible assemblage, raising at first sight a feeling of disgust, but giving a certain sense of terror the instant you perceived that the resignation of these souls, all engaged in the struggle for every necessary of life, was purely fortuitous, a speculation on benevolence. The two tallow candles which lighted the parlor flickered in a sort of fog caused by the fetid atmosphere of the ill-ventilated room.

The magistrate himself was not the least picturesque figure in the midst of this assembly. He had on his head a rusty cotton night-cap; as he had no cravat, his neck was visible, red with cold and wrinkled, in contrast with the threadbare collar of his old dressing-gown. His worn face had the half-stupid look that comes of absorbed attention. His lips, like those of all men who work, were puckered up like a bag with

the strings drawn tight. His knitted brows seemed to bear the burden of all the sorrows confided to him: he felt, analyzed, and judged them all. As watchful as a Jew money-lender, he never raised his eyes from his books and registers but to look into the very heart of the persons he was examining, with the flashing glance by which a miser expresses his alarm.

Lavienne, standing behind his master, ready to carry out his orders, served no doubt as a sort of police, and welcomed new-comers by encouraging them to get over their shyness. When the doctor appeared there was a stir on the benches. Lavienne turned his head, and was strangely surprised to see Bianchon.

"Ah! It is you, old boy!" exclaimed Popinot, stretching himself. "What brings you so early?"

"I was afraid lest you should make an official visit about which I wish to speak to you before I could see you."

"Well," said the lawyer, addressing a stout little woman who was still standing close to him, "if you do not tell me what it is you want, I cannot guess it, child."

"Make haste," said Lavienne. "Do not waste other people's time."

"Monsieur," said the woman at last, turning red, and speaking so low as only to be heard by Popinot and Lavienne, "I have a green-grocery truck, and I have my last baby out at nurse, and I owe for his keep. Well, I had hidden my little bit of money——"

"Yes; and your man took it?" said Popinot, guessing the sequel.

"Yes, sir."

"What is your name?"

"La Pomponne."

"And your husband's?"

"Toupinet."

"Rue du Petit-Banquier?" said Popinot, turning over his

register. "He is in prison," he added, reading a note at the margin of the section in which this family was described.

"For debt, my kind monsieur."

Popinot shook his head.

"But I have nothing to buy any stock for my truck; the landlord came yesterday and made me pay up; otherwise I should have been turned out."

Lavienne bent over his master, and whispered in his ear.

"Well, how much do you want to buy fruit in the market?"

"Why, my good monsieur, to carry on my business, I should want—yes, I should certainly want ten francs."

Popinot signed to Lavienne, who took ten francs out of a large bag, and handed them to the woman, while the lawyer made a note of the loan in his ledger. As he saw the thrill of delight that made the poor hawker tremble, Bianchon understood the apprehensions that must have agitated her on her way to the lawyer's house.

"You next," said Lavienne to the old man with the white beard.

Bianchon drew the servant aside, and asked him how long this audience would last.

"Monsieur has had two hundred persons this morning, and there are eighty to be turned off," said Lavienne. "You will have time to pay your early visit, sir."

"Here, my boy," said the lawyer, turning round and taking Horace by the arm; "here are two addresses near this—one in the Rue de Seine and the other in the Rue de l'Arbalète. Go there at once. Rue de Seine, a young girl has just asphyxiated herself; and Rue de l'Arbalète, you will find a man to remove to your hospital. I will wait breakfast for you."

Bianchon returned an hour later. The Rue du Fouarre was deserted; day was beginning to dawn there; his uncle had gone up to his rooms; the last poor wretch whose misery the judge had relieved was departing, and Lavienne's money-bag was empty.

"Well, how are they getting on?" asked the old lawyer, as the doctor came in.

"The man is dead," replied Bianchon; "the girl will get over it."

Since the eye and hand of a woman had been lacking, the flat in which Popinot lived had assumed an aspect in harmony with its master's. The indifference of a man who is absorbed in one dominant idea had set its stamp of eccentricity on everything. Everywhere lay unconquerable dust, every object was adapted to a wrong purpose with a pertinacity suggestive of a bachelor's home. There were papers in the flower vases, empty ink bottles on the tables, plates that had been forgotten, matches used as tapers for a minute when something had to be found, drawers or boxes half-turned out and left unfinished; in short, all the confusion and vacancies resulting from plans for order never carried out. The lawyer's private room, especially disordered by this incessant confusion, bore witness to his unresting pace, the hurry of a man overwhelmed with business, hurried by contradictory necessities. The bookcase looked as if it had been sacked; there were books scattered over everything, some piled up, open, one on another, others on the floor face downwards; registers of proceedings laid on the floor in rows, lengthwise, in front of the shelves; and that floor had not been polished for two years.

The tables and shelves were covered with *ex votos*, the offerings of the grateful poor. On a pair of blue glass jars which ornamented the chimney-shelf there were two glass balls, of which the core was made up of many colored fragments, giving them the appearance of some singular natural product. Against the wall hung frames of artificial flowers, and decorations in which Popinot's initials were surrounded by hearts and everlasting flowers. Here were boxes of elaborate and useless cabinet-work; there letter-weights carved in the style of work done by convicts in penal servitude. These masterpieces of patience, enigmas of gratitude, and withered



bouquets gave the lawyer's room the appearance of a toyshop. The good man used these works of art as hiding-places which he filled with bills, wornout pens, and scraps of paper. All these pathetic witnesses to his divine charity were thick with dust, dingy, and faded.

Some birds, beautifully stuffed, but eaten by moths, perched in this wilderness of trumpery, presided over by an Angora cat, Madame Popinot's pet, restored to her no doubt with all the graces of life by some impecunious naturalist, who thus repaid a gift of charity with a perennial treasure. Some local artist whose heart had misguided his brush had painted portraits of M. and Madame Popinot. Even in the bedroom there were embroidered pincushions, landscapes in cross-stitch, and crosses in folded paper, so elaborately cockled as to show the senseless labor they had cost.

The window curtains were black with smoke, and the hangings absolutely colorless. Between the fireplace and the large square table at which the magistrate worked, the cook had set two cups of coffee on a small table, and two armchairs, in mahogany and horsehair, awaited the uncle and nephew. As daylight, darkened by the windows, could not penetrate to this corner, the cook had left two dips burning, whose un-snuffed wicks showed a sort of mushroom growth, giving the red light which promises length of life to the candle from slowness of combustion—a discovery due, no doubt, to some miser with an inventive turn of mind.

"My dear uncle, you ought to wrap yourself more warmly when you go down to that parlor."

"I cannot bear to keep them waiting, poor souls!—Well, and what do you want of me?"

"I have come to ask you to dine to-morrow with the Marquise d'Espard."

"A relation of ours?" asked Popinot, with such genuine absence of mind that Bianchon laughed.

"No, uncle; the Marquise d'Espard is a high and puissant

lady, who has laid before the courts a petition desiring that a Commission in Lunacy should sit on her husband, and you are appointed——”

“And you want me to dine with her! Are you mad?” said the lawyer, taking up the code of proceedings. “Here, only read this article, prohibiting any magistrate’s eating or drinking in the house of either of two parties whom he is called upon to decide between. Let her come and see me, your Marquise, if she has anything to say to me. I was in fact to go to examine her husband to-morrow, after working the case up to-night.”

He rose, took up a packet of papers that lay under a weight where he could see it, and after reading the title, he said—

“Here is the affidavit. Since you take an interest in this high and puissant lady, let us see what she wants.”

Popinot wrapped his dressing-gown across his body, from which it was constantly slipping and leaving his chest bare; he sopped his bread in the half-cold coffee, and opened the petition, which he read, allowing himself to throw in a parenthesis now and then, and some discussions, in which his nephew took part:

“‘To Monsieur the President of the Civil Tribunal of the Lower Court of the Department of the Seine, sitting at the Palais de Justice.

“‘Madame Jeanne Clémentine Athénaïs de Blamont-Chauvry, wife of M. Charles Maurice Marie Andoche, Comte de Nègrepelisse, Marquis d’Espard’—a very good family—‘landowner, the said Mme. d’Espard living in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, No. 104, and the said M. d’Espard in the Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, No. 22’—to be sure, the President told me he lived in this part of the town—‘having for her solicitor Maître Desroches’—Desroches! a pettifogging jobber, a man looked down upon by his brother lawyers, and who does his clients no good——”

“Poor fellow!” said Bianchon, “unluckily he has no

money, and he rushes round like the devil in holy water—That is all.”

“ ‘Has the honor to submit to you, Monsieur the President, that for a year past the moral and intellectual powers of her husband, M. d’Espard, have undergone so serious a change, that at the present day they have reached the state of dementia and idiotcy provided for by Article 448 of the Civil Code, and require the application of the remedies set forth by that article, for the security of his fortune and his person, and to guard the interest of his children whom he keeps to live with him.

“ ‘That, in point of fact, the mental condition of M. d’Espard, which for some years has given grounds for alarm based on the system he has pursued in the management of his affairs, has reached, during the last twelvemonth a deplorable depth of depression ; that his infirm will was the first thing to show the results of the malady ; and that its effete state leaves M. the Marquis d’Espard exposed to all the perils of his incompetency, as is proved by the following facts :

“ ‘For a long time all the income accruing from M. d’Espard’s estates are paid, without any reasonable cause, or even temporary advantage, into the hands of an old woman, whose repulsive ugliness is generally remarked on, named Madame Jeanrenaud, living sometimes in Paris, Rue de la Vrillière, No. 8, sometimes at Villeparisis, near Claye, in the Department of Seine et Marne, and for the benefit of her son, aged thirty-six, an officer in the ex-Imperial Guards, whom the Marquis d’Espard has placed by his influence in the King’s Guards, as Major in the First Regiment of Cuirassiers. These two persons, who in 1814 were in extreme poverty, have since then purchased house-property of considerable value ; among other items, quite recently, a large house in the Grande Rue Verte, where the said Jeanrenaud is laying out considerable sums in order to settle there with the woman Jeanrenaud, intending to marry ; the sums amount already to more than a

hundred thousand francs. The marriage has been arranged by the intervention of M. d'Espard with his banker, one Mongenod, whose niece he has asked in marriage for the said Jeanrenaud, promising to use his influence to procure him the title and dignity of Baron. This has in fact been secured by his majesty's letters-patent, dated December 29th of last year, at the request of the Marquis d'Espard, as can be proved by his excellency the Keeper of the Seals, if the court should think proper to require his testimony.

“‘That no reason, not even such as morality and the law would concur in disapproving, can justify the influence which the said Mme. Jeanrenaud exerts over M. d'Espard, who, indeed, sees her very seldom; nor account for his strange affection for the said Baron Jeanrenaud, Major, with whom he has but little intercourse. And yet their power is so considerable, that whenever they need money, if only to gratify a mere whim, this lady or her son——’ Heh, heh! *no reason even such as morality and the law concur in disapproving!* What does the clerk or the attorney mean to insinuate?” said Popinot.

Bianchon laughed.

“‘This lady, or her son, obtain whatever they ask of the Marquis d'Espard without demur; and if he has not ready money, M. d'Espard draws bills to be paid by the said Mongenod, who has offered to give evidence to that effect for the petitioner.

“‘That, moreover, in further proof of these facts, lately, on the occasion of the renewal of the leases on the Espard estate, the farmers having paid a considerable premium for the renewal of their leases on the old terms, the said M. Jeanrenaud at once secured the payment of the money into his own hands.

“‘That the Marquis d'Espard parts with these sums of money so little of his own free-will, that when he was spoken to on the subject he seemed to remember nothing of the

matter; that whenever anybody of any weight has questioned him as to his devotion to these two persons, his replies have shown so complete an absence of ideas and of sense of his own interests, that there obviously must be some occult cause at work to which the petitioner begs to direct the eye of justice, inasmuch as it is impossible but that this cause should be criminal, malignant, and wrongful, or else of a nature to come under medical jurisdiction; unless this influence is of the kind which constitutes an abuse of moral power—such as can only be described by the word *possession*——’ The devil,” exclaimed Popinot. “What do you say to that, doctor? These are strange statements.”

“They might certainly,” said Bianchon, “be an effect of magnetic force.”

“Then do you believe in Mesmer’s nonsense, and his tub, and seeing through walls?”

“Yes, uncle,” said the doctor gravely. “As I heard you read that petition I thought of that. I assure you that I have verified, in another sphere of action, several analogous facts proving the unlimited influence one man may acquire over another. In contradiction to the opinion of my brethren, I am perfectly convinced of the power of the will regarded as a motor force. All collusion and charlatanism apart, I have seen the results of such a possession. Actions promised during sleep by a magnetized patient to the magnetizer have been scrupulously performed on waking. The will of one had become the will of the other.”

“Every kind of action?”

“Yes.”

“Even a criminal act?”

“Even a crime.”

“If it were not from you, I would not listen to such a thing.”

“I will make you witness it,” said Bianchon.

“Hm, hm,” muttered the lawyer. “But supposing that

this so-called possession fell under this class of facts, it would be difficult to prove it as legal evidence."

"If this woman Jeanrenaud is so hideously old and ugly, I do not see what other means of fascination she can have used," observed Bianchon.

"But," observed the lawyer, "in 1814, the time at which this fascination is supposed to have taken place, this woman was fourteen years younger; if she had been connected with M. d'Espard ten years before that, these calculations take us back four-and-twenty years, to a time when the lady may have been young and pretty, and have won for herself and her son a power over M. d'Espard which some men do not know how to evade. Though the source of this power is reprehensible in the sight of justice, it is justifiable in the eye of nature. Madame Jeanrenaud may have been aggrieved by the marriage, contracted probably at about that time, between the Marquis d'Espard and Mademoiselle de Blamont-Chauvry, and at the bottom of all this there may be nothing more than the rivalry of two women, since the Marquis has for a long time lived apart from Mme. d'Espard."

"But her repulsive ugliness, uncle."

"Power of fascination is in direct proportion to ugliness," said the lawyer; "that is an old story. And then think of the smallpox, doctor. But to proceed:

"That so long ago as in 1815, in order to supply the sums of money required by these two persons, the Marquis d'Espard went with his two children to live in the Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genève, in rooms quite unworthy of his name and rank—well, we may live as we please—that he keeps his two children there, the Comte Clément d'Espard and Vicomte Camille d'Espard, in a style of living quite unsuited to their future prospects, their name and fortune; that he often wants money, to such a point, that not long since the landlord, one Mariast, put in an execution on the furniture in the rooms; that when this execution was carried

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out in his presence, the Marquis d'Espard helped the bailiff, whom he treated like a man of rank, paying him all the marks of attention and respect which he would have shown to a person of superior birth and dignity to himself.' "

The uncle and nephew glanced at each other and laughed.

" 'That, moreover, every act of his life, besides the facts with reference to the widow Jeanrenaud and the Baron Jeanrenaud, her son, are those of a madman ; that for nearly ten years he has given his thoughts exclusively to China, its customs, manners, and history ; that he refers everything to a Chinese origin ; that when he is questioned on the subject, he confuses the events of the day and the business of yesterday with facts relating to China ; that he censures the acts of the government and the conduct of the King, though he is personally much attached to him, by comparing them with the politics of China.

" 'That this monomania has driven the Marquis d'Espard to conduct devoid of all sense : against the customs of men of rank, and, in opposition to his own professed ideas as to the duties of the nobility, he has joined a commercial undertaking, for which he constantly draws bills which, as they fall due, threaten both his honor and his fortune, since they stamp him as a trader, and in default of payment may lead to his being declared insolvent ; that these debts, which are owing to stationers, printers, lithographers, and print-colorists, who have supplied the materials for his publication, called " A Picturesque History of China," now coming out in parts, are so heavy that these tradesmen have requested the petitioner to apply for a Commission in Lunacy with regard to the Marquis d'Espard in order to save their own credit.' "

"The man is mad ! " exclaimed Bianchon.

"You think so, do you ? " said his uncle. "If you listen to only one bell, you hear only one sound."

"But it seems to me——" said Bianchon.

"But it seems to me," said Popinot, "that if any relation

of mine wanted to get hold of the management of my affairs, and if, instead of being a humble lawyer, whose colleagues can, any day, verify what his condition is, I were a duke of the realm, an attorney with a little cunning, like Desroches, might bring just such a petition against me.

“‘That his children’s education has been neglected for this monomania ; and that he has taught them, against all the rules of education, the facts of Chinese history, which contradict the tenets of the Catholic Church. He also has them taught the Chinese dialects.’”

“‘Here Desroches strikes me as funny,” said Bianchon.

“‘The petition is drawn up by his head clerk Godeschal, who, as you know, is not strong in Chinese,” said the lawyer.

“‘That he often leaves his children destitute of the most necessary things ; that the petitioner, notwithstanding her entreaties, can never see them ; that the said Marquis d’Espard brings them to her only once a year ; that, knowing the privations to which they are exposed, she makes vain efforts to give them the things most necessary for their existence, and which they require——’ Oh ! Madame la Marquise, this is preposterous. By proving too much you prove nothing. My dear boy,” said the old man, laying the document on his knee, “‘where is the mother who ever lacked heart and wit and yearning to such a degree as to fall below the inspiration suggested by her animal instinct ? A mother is as cunning to get at her children as a girl can be in the conduct of a love intrigue. If your Marquise really wanted to give her children food and clothes, the devil himself would not have hindered her, heh ? That is rather too big a fable for an old lawyer to swallow ? To proceed :

“‘That at the age the said children have now attained it is necessary that steps should be taken to preserve them from the evil effects of such an education ; that they should be provided for as beseems their rank, and that they should cease to have before their eyes the sad example of their father’s conduct.



“‘That there are proofs in support of these allegations which the court can easily order to be produced. Many times has M. d’Espard spoken of the judge of the Twelfth Arrondissement as a mandarin of the third class; he often speaks of the professors of the Collège Henri IV. as “men of letters”’—and that offends them! ‘In speaking of the simplest things, he says, “They were not done so in China;” in the course of the most ordinary conversation he will sometimes allude to Madame Jeanrenaud, or sometimes to events which happened in the time of Louis XIV., and then sit plunged in the darkest melancholy; sometimes he fancies he is in China. Several of his neighbors, among others one Edmé Becker, medical student, and Jean Baptiste Frémot, a professor, living under the same roof, are of opinion, after frequent intercourse with the Marquis d’Espard, that his monomania with regard to everything Chinese is the result of a scheme laid by the said Baron Jeanrenaud and the widow his mother to bring about the deadening of all the Marquis d’Espard’s mental faculties, since the only service which Mme. Jeanrenaud appears to render M. d’Espard is to procure him everything that relates to the Chinese Empire.

“‘Finally, that the petitioner is prepared to show the court that the moneys absorbed by the said Baron and Mme. Jeanrenaud between 1814 and 1828 amount to not less than one million francs.

“‘In confirmation of the facts herein set forth, the petitioner can bring the evidence of persons who are in the habit of seeing the Marquis d’Espard, whose names and professions are subjoined, many of whom have urged her to demand a commission in lunacy to declare M. d’Espard incapable of managing his own affairs, as being the only way to preserve his fortune from the effects of his maladministration and his children from his fatal influence.

“‘Taking all this into consideration, M. le Président, and the affidavits subjoined, the petitioner desires that it may

please you, inasmuch as the foregoing facts sufficiently prove the insanity and incompetency of the Marquis d'Espard herein described with his titles and residence, to order that, to the end that he may be declared incompetent by law, this petition and the documents in evidence may be laid before the King's public prosecutor; and that you will charge one of the judges of this court to make his report to you on any day you may be pleased to name, and thereupon to pronounce judgment,' etc.

"And here," said Popinot, "is the President's order instructing me!—Well, what does the Marquise d'Espard want with me? I know everything. But I shall go to-morrow with my registrar to see M. le Marquis, for this does not seem at all clear to me."

"Listen, my dear uncle, I have never asked the least little favor of you that had to do with your legal functions; well, I now beg you to show Madame d'Espard the kindness which her situation deserves. If she came here, you would listen to her?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, go and listen to her in her own house. Madame d'Espard is a sickly, nervous, delicate woman, who would faint in your rat's hole of a place. Go in the evening, instead of accepting her dinner, since the law forbids your eating or drinking at your client's expense."

"And does not the law forbid you from taking any legacy from your dead?" said Popinot, fancying that he saw a touch of irony on his nephew's lips.

"Come, uncle, if it were only to enable you to get at the truth of this business, grant my request. You will come as the examining judge, since matters do not seem to you very clear. Deuce take it! It is as necessary to cross-question the Marquise as it is to examine the Marquis."

"You are right," said the lawyer. "It is quite possible that it is she who is mad. I will go."

"I will call for you. Write down in your engagement

book: 'To-morrow evening at nine, Madame d'Espard.' Good!' said Bianchon, seeing his uncle make a note of the engagement.

Next evening at nine Bianchon mounted his uncle's dusty staircase, and found him at work on the statement of some complicated judgment. The coat Lavienne had ordered of the tailor had not been sent, so Popinot put on his old stained coat, and was the Popinot unadorned whose appearance made those laugh who did not know the secrets of his private life. Bianchon, however, obtained permission to pull his cravat straight, and to button his coat, and he hid the stains by crossing the breast of it with the right side over the left, and so displaying the new front of the cloth. But in a minute the judge rucked the coat up over his chest by the way in which he stuffed his hands into his pockets, obeying an irresistible habit. Thus the coat, deeply wrinkled both in front and behind, made a sort of hump in the middle of the back, leaving a gap between the waistcoat and trousers through which his shirt showed. Bianchon, to his sorrow, only discovered this crowning absurdity at the moment when his uncle entered the Marquise's room.

A brief sketch of the person and the career of the lady in whose presence the doctor and the judge now found themselves is necessary for an understanding of her interview with Popinot.

Madame d'Espard had, for the last seven years, been very much the fashion in Paris, where fashion can raise and drop by turn various personages who, now great and now small, that is to say, in view or forgotten, are at last quite intolerable—as discarded ministers are, and every kind of decayed sovereignty. These flatterers of the past, odious with their stale pretensions, know everything, speak ill of everything, and, like ruined profligates, are friends with all the world. Since her husband had separated from her in 1815, Madame

d'Espard must have married in the beginning of 1812. Her children, therefore, were aged respectively fifteen and thirteen. By what luck was the mother of a family, about three-and-thirty years of age, still the fashion?

Though fashion is capricious, and no one can foresee who shall be her favorites, though she often exalts a banker's wife, or some woman of very doubtful elegance and beauty, it certainly seems supernatural when fashion puts on constitutional airs and gives promotion for age. But in this case fashion had done as the world did, and accepted Madame d'Espard as still young.

The Marquise, who was thirty-three by her register of birth, was twenty-two in a drawing-room in the evening. But by what care, what artifice! Elaborate curls shaded her temples. She condemned herself to live in twilight, affecting illness so as to sit under the protecting tones of light filtered through muslin. Like Diane de Poitiers, she used cold water in her bath, and, like her again, the Marquise slept on a horsehair mattress, with morocco-covered pillows to preserve her hair; she ate very little, only drank water, and observed monastic regularity in the smallest actions of her life.

This severe system has, it is said, been carried so far as to the use of ice instead of water, and nothing but cold food, by a famous Polish lady of our day who spends a life, now verging on a century old, after the fashion of a town belle. Fated to live as long as Marion Delorme, whom history has credited with surviving to be a hundred and thirty, the old vice-queen of Poland, at the age of nearly a hundred, has the heart and brain of youth, a charming face, an elegant shape; and in her conversation, sparkling with brilliancy like faggots in the fire, she can compare the men and books of our literature with the men and books of the eighteenth century. Living in Warsaw, she orders her caps of Herbault in Paris. She is a great lady with the amiability of a mere girl; she swims, she runs like a schoolboy, and can sink on to a sofa with the grace of a young

coquette ; she mocks at death, and laughs at life. After having astonished the Emperor Alexander, she can still amaze the Emperor Nicholas by the splendor of her entertainments. She can still bring tears to the eyes of a youthful lover, for her age is whatever she pleases, and she has the exquisite self-devotion of a *grisette*. In short, she is herself a fairy tale, unless, indeed, she is a fairy.

Had Madame d'Espard known Madame Zayonseck ? Did she mean to imitate her career ? Be that as it may, the Marquise proved the merits of the treatment ; her complexion was clear, her brow unwrinkled, her figure, like that of Henri II.'s lady-love, preserved the litheness, the freshness, the covered charms which bring a woman love and keep it alive. The simple precautions of this course, suggested by art and nature, and perhaps by experience, had met in her with a general system which confirmed the results. The Marquise was absolutely indifferent to everything that was not herself : men amused her, but no man had ever caused her those deep agitations which stir both natures to their depths, and wreck one or the other. She knew neither hatred nor love. When she was offended, she avenged herself coldly, quietly, at her leisure, waiting for the opportunity to gratify the ill-will she cherished against anybody who dwelt in her unfavorable remembrance. She made no fuss, she did not excite herself ; she talked, because she knew that by two words a woman may cause the death of three men.

She had parted from M. d'Espard with the greatest satisfaction. Had he not taken with him two children who at present were troublesome, and in the future would stand in the way of her pretensions ? Her most intimate friends, as much as her least persistent admirers, seeing about her none of Cornelia's jewels, who come and go, and unconsciously betray their mother's age, took her for quite a young woman. The two boys, about whom she seemed so anxious in her petition, were like their father, as unknown in the world as the north-

west passage is unknown to navigators. M. d'Espard was supposed to be an eccentric personage who had deserted his wife without having the smallest cause for complaint against her.

Mistress of herself at two-and-twenty, and mistress of her fortune of twenty-six thousand francs a year, the Marquise hesitated long before deciding on a course of action and ordering her life. Though she benefited by the expenses her husband had incurred in his house, though she had all the furniture, the carriages, the horses, in short, all the details of a handsome establishment, she lived a retired life during the years 1816, 17, and 18, a time when families were recovering from the disasters resulting from political tempests. She belonged to one of the most important and illustrious families of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and her parents advised her to live with them as much as possible after the separation forced upon her by her husband's singular and inexplicable caprice.

In 1820 the Marquise roused herself from her lethargy; she went to Court, appeared at parties, and entertained in her own house. From 1821 to 1827 she lived in great style, and made herself remarked for her taste and her dress; she had a day, an hour, for receiving visits, and ere long she had seated herself on the throne, occupied before her by Madame la Vicomtesse de Beauséant, the Duchesse de Langeais, and Madame Firmiani—who on her marriage with M. de Camps had resigned the sceptre in favor of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, from whom Madame d'Espard snatched it. The world knew nothing beyond this of the private life of the Marquise d'Espard. She seemed likely to shine for long on the Parisian horizon, like the sun near its setting, but which will never set.

The Marquise was on terms of great intimacy with a duchess as famous for her beauty as for her attachment to a prince just now in banishment, but accustomed to play a leading part in

every prospective government. Madame d'Espard was also the friend of a foreign lady, with whom a famous and very wily Russian diplomat was in the habit of discussing public affairs. And then an antiquated countess, who was accustomed to shuffle the cards for the great game of politics, had adopted her in a maternal fashion. Thus, to any man of high ambitions, Madame d'Espard was preparing a covert but very real influence to follow the public and frivolous ascendancy she now owed to fashion. Her drawing-room was acquiring political individuality: "What do they say at Madame d'Espard's?" "Are they against the measure in Madame d'Espard's drawing-room?" were questions repeated by a sufficient number of simpletons to give the flock of the faithful who surrounded her the importance of a coterie. A few damaged politicians whose wounds she had bound up, and whom she flattered, pronounced her as capable in diplomacy as the wife of the Russian ambassador to London. The Marquise had indeed several times suggested to deputies or to peers words and ideas that had rung through Europe. She had often judged correctly of certain events on which her circle of friends dared not express an opinion. The principal persons about the Court came in the evening to play whist in her rooms.

Then she also had the qualities of her defects; she was thought to be—and she was—discreet. Her friendship seemed to be staunch; she worked for her protégés with a persistency which showed that she cared less for patronage than for increased influence. This conduct was based on her dominant passion: Vanity. Conquests and pleasure, which so many women love, to her seemed only means to an end; she aimed at living on every point of the largest circle that life can describe.

Among the men still young, and to whom the future belonged, who crowded her drawing-room on great occasions, were to be seen MM. de Marsay and de Ronquerolles, de

Montriveau, de la Roche-Hugon, de Sérizy, Ferraud, Maxime de Trailles, de Listomère, the two Vandenesses, du Châtelet, and others. She would frequently receive a man whose wife she would not admit, and her power was great enough to induce certain ambitious men to submit to these hard conditions, such as two famous royalist bankers, M. de Nucingen and Ferdinand du Tillet. She had so thoroughly studied the strength and the weakness of Paris life, that her conduct had never given any man the smallest advantage over her. An enormous price might have been set on a note or letter by which she might have compromised herself, without one being produced.

If an arid soul enabled her to play her part to the life, her person was no less available for it. She had a youthful figure. Her voice was, at will, soft and fresh, or clear and hard. She possessed in the highest degree the secret of that aristocratic pose by which a woman wipes out the past. The Marquise knew well the art of setting an immense space between herself and the sort of man who fancies he may be familiar after some chance advances. Her imposing gaze could deny everything. In her conversation fine and beautiful sentiments and noble resolutions flowed naturally, as it seemed, from a pure heart and soul ; but in reality she was all self, and quite capable of blasting a man who was clumsy in his negotiations, at the very time when she was shamelessly making a compromise for the benefit of her own interest.

Rastignac, in trying to fasten on to this woman, had discerned her to be the cleverest of tools, but he had not yet used it ; far from handling it, he was already finding himself crushed by it. This young *Condottiere* of the brain, condemned, like Napoleon, to give battle constantly, while knowing that a single defeat would prove the grave of his fortunes, had met a dangerous adversary in his protectress. For the first time in his turbulent life, he was playing a game with a partner worthy of him. He saw a place as Minister in



the conquest of Madame d'Espard, so he was her tool till he could make her his—a perilous beginning.

The Hôtel d'Espard needed a large household, and the Marquise had a great number of servants. The grand receptions were held in the ground-floor rooms, but she lived on the first floor of the house. The perfect order of a fine staircase splendidly decorated, and rooms fitted in the dignified style which formerly prevailed at Versailles, spoke of an immense fortune. When the judge saw the carriage gates thrown open to admit his nephew's cab, he took in with a rapid glance the lodge, the porter, the courtyard, the stables, the arrangement of the house, the flowers that decorated the stairs, the perfect cleanliness of the banisters, walls, and carpets, and counted the footmen in livery who, as the bell rang, appeared on the landing. His eyes, which only yesterday in his parlor had sounded the dignity of misery under the muddy clothing of the poor, now studied with the same penetrating vision the furniture and splendor of the rooms he passed through, to pierce to the misery of grandeur.

“M. Popinot. M. Bianchon.”

The two names were pronounced at the door of the boudoir where the Marquise was sitting, a pretty room recently refurnished, and looking out on the garden behind the house. At the moment Madame d'Espard was seated in one of the old-time armchairs of which Madame had set the fashion. Rastignac was at her left hand on a low chair, in which he looked settled like an Italian lady's “cousin.” A third person was standing by the corner of the chimney-piece. As the shrewd doctor had suspected, the Marquise was a woman of a parched and wiry constitution. But for her regimen her complexion must have taken the ruddy tone that is produced by constant heat; but she added to the effect of her acquired pallor by the strong colors of the stuffs she hung her rooms with, or in which she dressed. Reddish-brown, marone, bistre with a golden light in it, suited her to perfection. Her

boudoir, copied from that of a famous lady then at the height of fashion in London, was in tan-colored velvet ; but she had added various details of ornament which moderated the pompous splendor of this royal hue. Her hair was dressed like a girl's in bands ending in curls, which emphasized the rather long oval of her face ; but an oval face is as majestic as a round one is ignoble. The mirrors, cut with facets to lengthen or flatten the face at will, amply prove the rule as applied to the physiognomy.

On seeing Popinot, who stood in the doorway craning his neck like a startled animal, with his left hand in his pocket, and the right hand holding a hat with a greasy lining, the Marquise gave Rastignac a look wherein lay a germ of mockery. The good man's rather foolish appearance was so completely in harmony with his grotesque figure and scared looks, that Rastignac, catching sight of Bianchon's dejected expression of humiliation through his uncle, could not help laughing, and turned away. The Marquise bowed a greeting, and made a great effort to rise from her seat, falling back again, not without grace, with an air of apologizing for her incivility by affected weakness.

At this instant the person who was standing between the fireplace and the door bowed slightly, and pushed forward two chairs, which he offered by a gesture to the doctor and the judge ; then, when they had seated themselves, he leaned against the wall again, crossing his arms.

A word as to this man. There is living now, in our day, a painter—Decamps—who possesses in the very highest degree the art of commanding your interest in everything he sets before your eyes, whether it be a stone or a man. In this respect his pencil is more skilful than his brush. He will sketch an empty room and leave a broom against the wall. If he chooses, you shall shudder ; you shall believe that this broom has just been the instrument of crime, and is dripping with blood ; it shall be the broom which the widow Bancal

used to clean out the room where Fualdès was murdered. Yes, the painter will touzle that broom like a man in a rage; he will make each hair of it stand on end as though it were on your own bristling scalp; he will make it the interpreter between the secret poem of his imagination and the poem that shall have its birth in yours. After terrifying you by the aspect of that broom, to-morrow he will draw another, and lying by it a cat, asleep, but mysterious in its sleep, shall tell you that this broom is that on which the wife of a German cobbler rides off to the Sabbath on the Brocken. Or it will be a quite harmless broom, on which he will hang the coat of a clerk in the Treasury. Decamps had in his brush what Paganini had in his bow—a magnetically communicative power.

Well, I should have to transfer to my style that striking genius, that marvelous knack of the pencil, to depict the upright, tall, lean man dressed in black, with black hair, who stood there without speaking a word. This gentleman had a face like a knife-blade, cold and harsh, with a color like Seine water when it is muddy and strewn with fragments of charcoal from a sunken barge. He looked at the floor, listening and passing judgment. His attitude was terrifying. He stood there like the dreadful broom to which Decamps has given the power of revealing a crime. Now and then, in the course of conversation, the Marquise tried to get some tacit advice; but however eager her questioning, he was as grave and as rigid as the statue of the Commendatore.

The worthy Popinot, sitting on the edge of his chair in front of the fire, his hat between his knees, stared at the gilt chandeliers, the clock, and the curiosities with which the chimney-shelf was covered, the velvet and trimmings of the curtains, and all the costly and elegant nothings that a woman of fashion collects about her. He was roused from his homely meditations by Madame d'Espard, who addressed him in a piping tone—

"Monsieur, I owe you a million thanks——"

"A million thanks," thought he to himself, "that is too many; it does not mean one."

"For the trouble you condescend——"

"Condescend!" thought he; "she is laughing at me."

"To take in coming to see an unhappy client, who is too ill to go out——"

Here the lawyer cut the Marquise short by giving her an inquisitorial look, examining the sanitary condition of the unhappy client.

"As sound as a bell," said he to himself.

"Madame," said he, assuming a respectful mien, "you owe me nothing. Although my visit to you is not in strict accordance with the practice of the court, we ought to spare no pains to discover the truth in cases of this kind. Our judgment is then guided less by the letter of the law than by the promptings of our conscience. Whether I seek the truth here or in my own consulting-room, so long as I find it, all will be well."

While Popinot was speaking, Rastignac was shaking hands with Bianchon; the Marquise welcomed the doctor with a little bow full of gracious significance.

"Who is that?" asked Bianchon in a whisper of Rastignac, indicating the dark man.

"The Chevalier d'Espard, the Marquis' brother."

"Your nephew told me," said the Marquise to Popinot, "how much you are occupied, and I know too that you are so good as to wish to conceal your kind actions, so as to release those whom you oblige from the burden of gratitude. The work in court is most fatiguing, it would seem. Why have they not twice as many judges?"

"Ah, madame, that would not be difficult; we should be none the worse if they had. But when that happens, fowls will cut their teeth!"

As he heard this speech, so entirely in character with the

lawyer's appearance, the Chevalier measured him from head to foot, out of one eye, as much as to say, "We shall easily manage him!"

The Marquise looked at Rastignac, who bent over her. "That is the sort of man," murmured the dandy in her ear, "who is trusted to pass judgments on the life and interests of private individuals."

Like most men who have grown old in a business, Popinot readily let himself follow the habits he had acquired, more particularly habits of mind. His conversation was all of "the shop." He was fond of questioning those he talked to, forcing them to unexpected conclusions, making them tell more than they wished to reveal. Pozzo di Borgo, it is said, used to amuse himself by discovering other folks' secrets, and entangling them in his diplomatic snares, and thus, by invincible habit, showed how his mind was soaked in wiliness. As soon as Popinot had surveyed the ground, so to speak, on which he stood, he saw that it would be necessary to have recourse to the cleverest subtleties, the most elaborately wrapped up and disguised, which were in use in the courts, to detect the truth.

Bianchon sat cold and stern, as a man who has made up his mind to endure torture without revealing his sufferings; but in his heart he wished that his uncle could only trample on this woman as we trample on a viper—a comparison suggested to him by the Marquise's long dress, by the curve of her attitude, her long neck, small head, and undulating movements. He felt that beneath the surface of her nature there lay a crafty spirit, designing to conceal the truth.

"Well, monsieur," said Madame d'Espard, "however great my dislike to be or seem selfish, I have been suffering too long not to wish that you may settle matters at once. Shall I soon get a favorable decision?"

"Madame, I will do my best to bring matters to a conclusion," said Popinot, with an air of frank good-nature.

"Are you ignorant of the reason which made the separation necessary which now subsists between you and the Marquis d'Espard?"

"Yes, monsieur," she replied, evidently prepared with a story to tell. "At the beginning of 1816 M. d'Espard, whose temper had completely changed within three months or so, proposed that we should go to live on one of his estates near Briançon, without any regard for my health, which that climate would have destroyed, or for my habits of life; I refused to go. My refusal gave rise to such unjustifiable reproaches on his part, that from that hour I had my suspicions as to the soundness of his mind. On the following day he left me, leaving me his house and the free use of my own income, and he went to live in the Rue de la Montagne-Saint-Genève, taking with him my two children——"

"One moment, madame," said the lawyer interrupting her. "What was that income?"

"Twenty-six thousand francs a year," she replied parenthetically. "I at once consulted old M. Bordin as to what I ought to do," she went on; "but it seems that there are so many difficulties in the way of depriving a father of the care of his children, that I was forced to resign myself to remaining alone at the age of twenty-two—an age at which many young women do very foolish things. You have read my petition, no doubt, monsieur; you know the principal facts on which I rely to procure a commission in lunacy with regard to M. d'Espard?"

"Have you ever applied to him, madame, to obtain the care of your children?"

"Yes, monsieur; but in vain. It is very hard on a mother to be deprived of the affection of her children, particularly when they can give her such happiness as every woman clings to."

"The elder must be sixteen," said Popinot.

"Fifteen," said the Marquise eagerly.

Here Bianchon and Rastignac looked at each other. Madame d'Espard bit her lips.

"What can the age of my children matter to you?"

"Well, madame," said the lawyer, without seeming to attach any importance to his words, "a lad of fifteen and his brother, of thirteen, I suppose, have legs and their wits about them; they might come to see you on the sly. If they do not, it is because they obey their father, and to obey him in that matter they must love him very dearly."

"I do not understand," said the Marquise

"You do not know, perhaps," replied Popinot, "that in your petition your attorney represents your children as being very unhappy with their father?"

Madame d'Espard replied with charming innocence—

"I do not know what my attorney may have put into my mouth."

"Forgive my inferences," said Popinot, "but justice weighs everything. What I ask you, madame, is suggested by my wish thoroughly to understand the matter. By your account M. d'Espard deserted you on the most frivolous pretext. Instead of going to Briançon, where he wished to take you, he remained in Paris. This point is not clear. Did he know this Madame Jeanrenaud before his marriage?"

"No, monsieur," replied the Marquise, with some asperity, visible only to Rastignac and the Chevalier d'Espard.

She was offended at being cross-questioned by this lawyer when she had intended to beguile his judgment; but as Popinot still looked stupid from sheer absence of mind, she ended by attributing his interrogatory to the questioning spirit of Voltaire's bailiff.

"My parents," she went on, "married me at the age of sixteen to M. d'Espard, whose name, fortune, and mode of life were such as my family looked for in the man who was to be my husband. M. d'Espard was then six-and-twenty; he was a gentleman in the English sense of the word; his

manners pleased me, he seemed to have plenty of ambition, and I like ambitious people," she added, looking at Rastignac. "If M. d'Espard had never met that Madame Jeanrenaud, his character, his learning, his acquirements would have raised him—as his friends then believed—to high office in the government. King Charles X., at that time, monsieur, had the greatest esteem for him, and a peer's seat, an appointment at Court, some important post certainly would have been his. That woman turned his head, and has ruined all the prospects of my family."

"What were M. d'Espard's religious opinions at that time?"

"He was, and is still, a very pious man."

"You do not suppose that Madame Jeanrenaud may have influenced him by mysticism?"

"No, monsieur."

"You have a very fine house, madame," said Popinot suddenly, taking his hands out of his pockets, and rising to pick up his coat-tails and warm himself. "This boudoir is very nice, those chairs are magnificent, the whole apartment is sumptuous. You must indeed be most unhappy when, seeing yourself here, you know that your children are ill lodged, ill clothed, and ill fed. I can imagine nothing more terrible for a mother."

"Yes, indeed. I should be so glad to give the poor little fellows some amusement, while their father keeps them at work from morning till night at that wretched history of China."

"You give handsome balls; they would enjoy them, but they might acquire a taste for dissipation. However, their father might send them to you once or twice in the course of the winter."

"He brings them here on my birthday and on New Year's Day. On those days M. d'Espard does me the favor of dining here with them."



"It is very singular behavior," said the judge, with an air of conviction. "Have you ever seen this Dame Jeanrenaud?"

"Yes. My brother-in-law one day, out of interest in his brother——"

"Ah! monsieur is M. d'Espard's brother?" said the lawyer, interrupting her.

The Chevalier bowed, but did not speak.

"M. d'Espard, who has watched this affair, took me to the Oratoire, where this woman goes to sermon, for she is a Protestant. I saw her; she is not in the least attractive; she looks like a butcher's wife, extremely fat, horribly marked with the smallpox; she has feet and hands like a man's, she squints; in short, she is monstrous!"

"It is inconceivable," said the judge, looking like the most imbecile judge in the whole kingdom. "And this creature lives here, Rue Verte, in a fine house? There are no plain folks left, it would seem?"

"In a mansion on which her son has spent absurd sums."

"Madame," said Popinot, "I live in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau; I know nothing of such expenses. What do you call absurd sums?"

"Well," said the Marquise, "a stable with five horses and three carriages, a phaeton, a brougham, and a cabriolet."

"That costs a large sum, then?" asked Popinot in surprise.

"Enormous sums!" said Rastignac, intervening. "Such an establishment would cost, for the stables, the keeping the carriages in order, and the liveries for the men, between fifteen and sixteen thousand francs a year."

"Should you think so, madame?" said the judge, looking much astonished.

"Yes, at least," replied the Marquise.

"And the furniture, too, must have cost a lot of money?"

"More than a hundred thousand francs," replied Madame d'Espard, who could not help smiling at the lawyer's vulgarity.

"Judges, madame, are apt to be incredulous; it is what

they are paid for, and I am incredulous. The Baron Jeanrenaud and his mother must have fleeced M. d'Espard most preposterously, if what you say is correct. There is a stable establishment which, by your account, costs sixteen thousand francs a year. Housekeeping, servants' wages, and the gross expenses of the house itself must run to twice as much; that makes a total of from fifty to sixty thousand francs a year. Do you suppose that these people, formerly so extremely poor, can have so large a fortune? A million yields scarcely forty thousand a year."

"Monsieur, the mother and son invested the money given them by M. d'Espard in the funds when they were at 60 to 80. I should think their income must be more than sixty thousand francs. And then the son has fine appointments."

"If they spend sixty thousand francs a year," said the judge, "how much do you spend?"

"Well," said Madame d'Espard, "about the same." The Chevalier started a little, the Marquise colored; Bianchon looked at Rastignac; but Popinot preserved an expression of simplicity which quite deceived Madame d'Espard. The Chevalier took no part in the conversation; he saw that all was lost.

"These people, madame, might be indicted before the Superior Court," said Popinot.

"That was my opinion," exclaimed the Marquise, enchanted. "If threatened with the police, they would have come to terms."

"Madame," said Popinot, "when M. d'Espard left you, did he not give you a power of attorney enabling you to manage and control your own affairs?"

"I do not understand the object of all these questions," said the Marquise with petulance. "It seems to me that if you would only consider the state in which I am placed by my husband's insanity, you ought to be troubling yourself about him, and not about me."

"We are coming to that, madame," said the judge. "Before placing in your hands, or in any others, the control of M. d'Espard's property, supposing he were pronounced incapable, the court must inquire as to how you have managed your own. If M. d'Espard gave you power, he would have shown confidence in you, and the court would recognize the fact. Had you any power from him? You might have bought or sold house property or invested money in business?"

"No, monsieur, the Blamont-Chauvrys are not in the habit of trading," said she, extremely nettled in her pride as an aristocrat, and forgetting the business in hand. "My property is intact, and M. d'Espard gave me no power to act."

The Chevalier put his hand over his eyes not to betray the vexation he felt at his sister-in-law's shortsightedness, for she was ruining herself by her answers. Popinot had gone straight to the mark in spite of his apparent doublings. Those present, closely watching the examination, saw her evident discomfiture.

"Madame," said the lawyer, indicating the Chevalier, "this gentleman, of course, is your near connection? May we speak openly before these other gentlemen?"

"Speak on," said the Marquise, surprised at this caution.

"Well, madame, granting that you spend only sixty thousand francs a year, to any one who sees your stables, your house, your train of servants, and a style of housekeeping which strikes me as far more luxurious than that of the Jeanrenauds, that sum would seem well laid out."

The Marquise bowed an agreement.

"But," continued the judge, "if you have no more than twenty-six thousand francs a year, you may have a hundred thousand francs of debts. The court would therefore have a right to imagine that the motives which prompt you to ask that your husband may be deprived of the control of his property are complicated by self-interest and the need for paying

your debts—if—you—have—any. The requests addressed to me have interested me in your position ; consider fully and make your confession. If my suppositions have hit the truth, there is yet time to avoid the blame which the court would have a perfect right to express in the saving clauses of the verdict if you could not show your attitude to be absolutely honorable and clear.

“It is our duty to examine the motives of the applicant as well as to listen to the plea of the witness under examination, to ascertain whether the petitioner may not have been prompted by passion, by a desire for money, which is unfortunately too common——”

The Marquise was on Saint Laurence’s gridiron.

“And I must have explanations on this point. Madame, I have no wish to call you to account ; I only want to know how you have managed to live at the rate of sixty thousand francs a year, and that for some years past. There are plenty of women who achieve this in their housekeeping, but you are not one of those. Tell me, you may have the most legitimate resources, a royal pension, or some claim on the indemnities lately granted ; but even then you must have had your husband’s authority to receive them.”

The Marquise did not speak.

“You must remember,” Popinot went on, “that M. d’Espard may wish to enter a protest, and his counsel will have a right to find out whether you have any creditors. This boudoir is newly furnished, your rooms are not now furnished with the things left to you by M. d’Espard in 1816. If, as you did me the honor of informing me, furniture is costly for the Jeanrenauds, it must be yet more so for you, who are a great lady. Though I am a judge, I am but a man ; I may be wrong—tell me so. Remember the duties imposed on me by the law, and the rigorous inquiries it demands, when the case before it is the suspension from all his functions of the father of a family in the prime of life. So you will pardon me,

Madame la Marquise, for laying all these difficulties before you ; it will be easy for you to give me an explanation.

"When a man is pronounced incapable of the control of his own affairs, a trustee has to be appointed. Who will be the trustee?"

"His brother," said the Marquise.

The Chevalier bowed. There was a short silence, very uncomfortable for the five persons who were present. The judge, in sport as it were, had laid open the woman's sore place. Popinot's countenance of common, clumsy good-nature, at which the Marquise, the Chevalier, and Rastignac had been inclined to laugh, had gained importance in their eyes. As they stole a look at him, they discerned the various expressions of that eloquent mouth. The ridiculous mortal was a judge of acumen. His studious notice of the boudoir was accounted for ; he had started from the gilt elephant supporting the chimney-clock, examining all this luxury, and had ended by reading this woman's soul.

"If the Marquis d'Espard is mad about China, I see that you are not less fond of its products," said Popinot, looking at the porcelain on the chimney-piece. "But perhaps it was from M. le Marquis that you had these charming Oriental pieces," and he pointed to some precious trifles.

This irony, in very good taste, made Bianchon smile and petrified Rastignac, while the Marquise bit her thin lips.

"Instead of being the protector of a woman placed in a cruel dilemma—an alternative between losing her fortune and her children, and being regarded as her husband's enemy," she said, "you accuse me, monsieur ! You suspect my motives ! You must own that your conduct is strange !"

"Madame," said the judge eagerly, "the caution exercised by the court in such cases as these might have given you, in any other judge, a perhaps less indulgent critic than I am. And do you suppose that M. d'Espard's lawyer will show you any great consideration ? Will he not be suspicious of mo-

tives which may be perfectly pure and disinterested? Your life will be at his mercy; he will inquire into it without qualifying his search by the respectful deference I have for you."

"I am much obliged to you, monsieur," said the Marquise satirically. "Admitting for the moment that I owe thirty thousand, or fifty thousand francs, in the first place, it would be a mere trifle to the d'Espards and the de Blamont-Chauvrys. But if my husband is not in the possession of his mental faculties, would that prevent his being pronounced incapable?"

"No, madame," said Popinot.

"Although you have questioned me with a sort of cunning which I should not have expected in a judge, and under circumstances where straightforwardness would have answered your purpose," she went on, "I will tell you without subterfuge that my position in the world, and the efforts I have to make to keep up my connection, are not in the least to my taste. I began my life by a long period of solitude; but my children's interest appealed to me; I felt that I must fill their father's place. By receiving my friends, by keeping up all this connection, by contracting these debts, I have secured their future welfare; I have prepared for them a brilliant career where they will find help and favor; and to have what has thus been acquired, many a man of business, lawyer or banker, would gladly pay all it has cost me."

"I appreciate your devoted conduct, madame," replied Popinot. "It does you honor, and I blame you for nothing. A judge belongs to all: he must know and weigh every fact."

Madame d'Espard's tact and practice in estimating men made her understand that M. Popinot was not to be influenced by any consideration. She had counted on an ambitious lawyer, she had found a man of conscience. She at once thought of finding other means for securing the success of her side.

The servants brought in tea.

"Have you any further explanations to give me, madame?" said Popinot, seeing these preparations.

"Monsieur," she replied haughtily, "do your business your own way; question M. d'Espard, and you will pity me, I am sure." She raised her head, looking Popinot in the face with pride, mingled with impertinence; the worthy man bowed himself out respectfully.

"A nice man is your uncle," said Rastignac to Bianchon. "Is he really so dense? Does he not know what the Marquise d'Espard is, what her influence means, her unavowed power over people? The Keeper of the Seals will be with her to-morrow——"

"My dear fellow, how can I help it?" said Bianchon. "Did I not warn you? He is not a man you can get over."

"No," said Rastignac; "he is a man you must run over."

The doctor was obliged to make his bow to the Marquise and her mute Chevalier to catch up with Popinot, who, not being the man to endure an embarrassing position, was pacing through the rooms.

"That woman owes a hundred thousand crowns," said the judge, as he stepped into his nephew's cab.

"And what do you think of the case?" asked Bianchon as he followed his uncle into the cab.

"I," said the judge. "I never have an opinion till I have gone into everything. To-morrow early I will send to Madame Jeanrenaud to call on me in my private office at four o'clock, to make her explain the facts which concern her, for she is compromised."

"I should very much like to know what the end will be."

"Why, bless me, do you not see that the Marquise is the tool of that tall lean man who never uttered a word? There is a strain of Cain in him, but of the Cain who goes to the law courts for his bludgeon, and there, unluckily for him, we keep more than one Damocles' sword.

"Oh, Rastignac! what brought you into that boat, I wonder?" exclaimed Bianchon.

"Ah, we are used to seeing these little family conspiracies," said Popinot. "Not a year passes without a number of verdicts of 'insufficient evidence' against applications of this kind. In our state of society such an attempt brings no dishonor, while we send a poor devil to the galleys if he breaks a pane of glass dividing him from a bowl full of gold. Our Code is not faultless."

"But these are the facts?"

"My boy, do you not know all the judicial romances with which clients impose on their attorneys? If the attorneys condemned themselves to state nothing but the truth, they would not earn enough to keep their office open."

Next day, at four in the afternoon, a very stout dame, looking a good deal like a cask dressed up in a gown and belt, mounted Judge Popinot's stairs, perspiring and panting. She had, with great difficulty, got out of a green landau, which suited her to a miracle; you could not think of the woman without the landau, or the landau without the woman.

"It is I, my dear sir," said she, appearing in the doorway of the judge's room. "Madame Jeanrenaud, whom you summoned exactly as if I were a thief, neither more nor less."

The common words were spoken in a common voice, broken by the wheezing of asthma, and ending in a cough.

"When I go through a damp place, I can't tell you what I suffer, sir. I shall never make old bones, saving your presence. However, here I am."

The lawyer was quite amazed at the appearance of this supposed *Maréchale d'Ancre*. Madame Jeanrenaud's face was pitted with an infinite number of little holes, was very red, with a pug nose and a low forehead, and was as round as a ball; for everything about the good woman was round. She had the bright eyes of a countrywoman, an honest gaze, a



cheerful tone, and chestnut hair held in place by a bonnet cap under a green bonnet decked with a shabby bunch of auriculas. Her stupendous bust was a thing to laugh at, for it made one fear some grotesque explosion every time she coughed. Her enormous legs were of the shape which make the Paris street boy describe such a woman as being built on piles. The widow wore a green gown trimmed with chinchilla, which looked on her as a splash of dirty oil would look on a bride's veil. In short, everything about her harmonized with her last words: "Here I am."

"Madame," said Popinot, "you are suspected of having used some seductive arts to induce M. d'Espard to hand over to you very considerable sums of money."

"Of what! of what!" cried she. "Of seductive arts? But, my dear sir, you are a man to be respected, and, moreover, as a lawyer you ought to have some good sense. Look at me! Tell me if I am likely to seduce any one. I cannot tie my own shoes, nor even stoop. For these twenty years past, the Lord be praised, I have not dared to put on a pair of stays under pain of sudden death. I was as thin as an asparagus stalk when I was seventeen, and pretty too—I may say so now. So I married Jeanrenaud, a good fellow, and head man on the salt-barges. I had my boy, who is a fine young man; he is my pride, and it is not holding myself cheap to say he is my best piece of work. My little Jeanrenaud was a soldier who did Napoleon credit, and who served in the Imperial Guard. But, alas! at the death of my old man, who was drowned, times changed for the worse. I had the smallpox. I was kept two years in my room without stirring, and I came out of it the size you see me, hideous for ever, and as wretched as could be. These are my seductive arts."

"But what, then, can the reasons be that have induced M. d'Espard to give you sums——?"

"Hugious sums, monsieur, say the word; I do not mind.

But as to his reasons, I am not at liberty to explain them," said she with marked determination.

"You are wrong. At this moment, his family, very naturally alarmed, are about to bring an action——"

"Heavens above us!" said the good woman, starting up. "Is it possible that he should be worried on my account? That king of men, a man that has not his match! Rather than he should have the smallest trouble, or a hair less on his head I could almost say, we would return every sou, monsieur. Write that down on your papers. Heaven above us! I will go at once and tell Jeanrenaud what is going on! A pretty thing indeed!"

And the little old woman went out, rolled herself downstairs, and disappeared.

"That one tells no lies," said Popinot to himself. "Well, to-morrow I shall know the whole story, for I shall go to see the Marquis d'Espard."

People who have outlived the age when a man wastes his vitality at random know how great an influence may be exercised on more important events by apparently trivial incidents, and will not be surprised at the weight here given to the following minor fact. Next day Popinot had an attack of coryza, a complaint which is not dangerous, and generally known by the absurd and inadequate name of a cold in the head.

The judge, who could not suppose that the delay could be serious, feeling himself a little feverish, kept his room, and did not go to see the Marquis d'Espard. This day lost was, to this affair, what on the Day of Dupes the cup of soup had been, taken by Marie de Medici, which, by delaying her meeting with Louis XIII., enabled Richelieu to arrive at Saint-Germain, the point of destination, before her, and recapture his royal slave.

Before accompanying the lawyer and his registering clerk to the Marquis d'Espard's house, it may be as well to glance at

the home and the private affairs of this father of sons whom his wife's petition represented to be a madman.

Here and there in the old parts of Paris a few buildings may still be seen in which the archæologist can discern an intention of decorating the city, and that love of property which leads the owner to give a durable character to the structure. The house in which M. d'Espard was then living, in the Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, was one of these old mansions, built in stone, and not devoid of a certain richness of style; but time had blackened the stone, and revolutions in the town had damaged it both outside and inside. The dignitaries who formerly dwelt in the neighborhood of the University having disappeared with the great ecclesiastical foundations, this house had become the home of industries and of inhabitants whom it was never destined to shelter. During the last century a printing establishment had worn down the polished floors, soiled the carved wood, blackened the walls, and altered the principal internal arrangements. Formerly the residence of a cardinal, this fine house was now divided among plebeian tenants. The character of the architecture showed that it had been built under the reigns of Henry III., Henry IV., and Louis XIII., at the time when the hotels Mignon and Serpente were erected in the same neighborhood, with the palace of the Princess Palatine, and the Sorbonne. An old man could remember having heard it called, in the last century, the hotel Duperron, so it seemed probable that the illustrious cardinal of that name had built, or perhaps merely lived in it.

There still exists, indeed, in the corner of the courtyard a *perron* of flight of several outer steps by which the house is entered; and the way into the garden on the garden front is down a similar flight of steps. In spite of dilapidations, the luxury lavished by the architect on the balustrade and entrance porch crowning these two *perrons* suggests the simple-minded purpose of commemorating the owner's name, a sort of sculp-

tured pun which our ancestors often allowed themselves. Finally, in support of this evidence, archæologists can still discern in the medallions which show on the principal front some traces of the cords of the Roman hat.

M. le Marquis d'Espard lived on the ground floor, in order, no doubt, to enjoy the garden, which might be called spacious for that neighborhood, and which lay open to the south, two advantages imperatively necessary for his children's health. The situation of the house, in a street on a steep hill, as its name indicates, secured these ground-floor rooms against ever being damp. M. d'Espard had taken them, no doubt, for a very moderate price, rents being low at the time when he settled in that quarter, in order to be among the schools and to superintend his boys' education. Moreover, the state in which he found the place, with everything to repair, had no doubt induced the owner to be accommodating. Thus M. d'Espard had been able to go to some expense to settle himself suitably without being accused of extravagance. The loftiness of the rooms, the paneling, of which nothing survived but the frames, the decoration of the ceilings, all displayed the dignity which the prelacy stamped on whatever it attempted or created, and which artists discern to this day in the smallest relic that remains, though it be but a book, a dress, the panel of a bookcase, or an armchair.

The Marquis had the rooms painted in the rich brown tones beloved of the Dutch and of the citizens of Old Paris, hues which lend such good effects to the painter of *genre*. The panels were hung with plain paper in harmony with the paint. The window curtains were of inexpensive materials, but chosen so as to produce a generally happy result ; the furniture was not too crowded and judiciously placed. Any one going into this home could not resist a sense of sweet peacefulness, produced by the perfect calm, the stillness which prevailed, by the unpretentious unity of color, the keeping of the picture, in the words a painter might use. A certain nobleness in the

details, the exquisite cleanliness of the furniture, and a perfect concord of men and things, all brought the word "suavity" to the lips.

Few persons were admitted to the rooms used by the Marquis and his two sons, whose life might perhaps seem mysterious to their neighbors. In a wing towards the street, on the third floor, there are three large rooms which had been left in a state of dilapidation and grotesque bareness to which they had been reduced by the printing works. These three rooms, devoted to the evolution of the "Picturesque History of China," were contrived to serve as a writing-room, a depository, and a private room, where M. d'Espard sat during part of the day; for, after breakfast till four in the afternoon, the Marquis remained in this room on the third floor to work at the publication he had undertaken. Visitors wanting to see him commonly found him there, and often the two boys on their return from school resorted thither. Thus the ground-floor rooms were a sort of sanctuary where the father and sons spent their time from the hour of dinner till the next day, and his domestic life was carefully closed against the public eye.

His only servants were a cook—an old woman who had long been attached to his family—and a manservant forty years old, who was with him when he married Mademoiselle de Blamont. His children's nurse had also remained with them, and the minute care to which the apartment bore witness revealed the sense of order and the maternal affection expended by this woman in her master's interest, in the management of his house, and the charge of his children. These three good souls, grave and uncommunicative folks, seemed to have entered into the idea which ruled the Marquis' domestic life. And the contrast between their habits and those of most servants was a peculiarity which cast an air of mystery over the house, and fomented the calumny to which M. d'Espard himself lent occasion. Very laudable motives had made him determine never to be on visiting terms with

any of the other tenants in the house. In undertaking to educate his boys he wished to keep them from all contact with strangers. Perhaps, too, he wished to avoid the intrusion of neighbors.

In a man of his rank, at a time when the *Quartier Latin* was distracted by Liberalism, such conduct was sure to rouse in opposition a host of petty passions, of feelings whose folly is only to be measured by their meanness, the outcome of porters' gossip and malevolent tattle from door to door, all unknown to M. d'Espard and his retainers. His manservant was stigmatized as a Jesuit, his cook as a sly fox; the nurse was in collusion with Madame Jeanrenaud to rob the madman. The madman was the Marquis. By degrees the other tenants came to regard as proofs of madness a number of things they had noticed in M. d'Espard, and passed through the sieve of their judgment without discerning any reasonable motive for them.

Having no belief in the success of "the History of China," they had managed to convince the landlord of the house that M. d'Espard had no money just at a time when, with the forgetfulness which often befalls busy men, he had allowed the tax-collector to send him a summons for non-payment of arrears. The landlord had forthwith claimed his quarter's rent from January 1st by sending in a receipt, which the porter's wife had amused herself by detaining. On the 15th a summons to pay was served on M. d'Espard, the portress had delivered it at her leisure, and he supposed it to be some misunderstanding, not conceiving of any incivility from a man in whose house he had been living for twelve years. The Marquis was actually seized by a bailiff at the time when his manservant had gone to carry the money for the rent to the landlord.

This arrest, insidiously reported to the persons with whom he was in treaty for his undertaking, had alarmed some of them who were already doubtful of M. d'Espard's solvency in

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consequence of the enormous sums which Baron Jeanrenaud and his mother were said to be receiving from him. And, indeed, these suspicions on the part of the tenants, the creditors, and the landlord had some excuse in the Marquis' extreme economy in housekeeping. He conducted it as a ruined man might. His servants always paid in ready money for the most trifling necessities of life, and acted as not choosing to take credit; if now they had asked for anything on credit, it would probably have been refused, calumnious gossip had been so widely believed in the neighborhood. There are tradesmen who like those of their customers who pay badly when they see them often, while they hate others, and very good ones, who hold themselves on too high a level to allow of any familiarity as *chums*, a vulgar but expressive word. Men are made so; in almost every class they will allow to a gossip, or a vulgar soul that flatters them, facilities and favors they refuse to the superiority they resent, in whatever form it may show itself. The shopkeeper who rails at the court has his courtiers.

In short, the manners of the Marquis and his children were certain to arouse ill-feeling in their neighbors, and to work them up by degrees to the pitch of malevolence when men do not hesitate at an act of meanness if only it may damage the adversary they have themselves created.

M. d'Espard was a gentleman, as his wife was a lady, by birth and breeding; noble types, already so rare in France that the observer can easily count the persons who perfectly realize them. These two characters are based on primitive ideas, on beliefs that may be called innate, on habits formed in infancy, and which have ceased to exist. To believe in pure blood, in a privileged race, to stand in thought above other men, must we not from birth have measured the distance which divides patricians from the mob? To command, must we not have never met our equal? And, finally, must not education inculcate the ideas with which nature inspires those

great men on whose brow she has placed a crown before their mother has ever set a kiss there? These ideas, this education, are no longer possible in France, where for forty years past chance has arrogated the right of making noblemen by dipping them in the blood of battles, by gilding them with glory, by crowning them with the halo of genius; where the abolition of entail and of eldest sonship, by frittering away estates, compels the nobleman to attend to his own business instead of attending to affairs of state, and where personal greatness can only be such greatness as is acquired by long and patient toil; quite a new era.

Regarded as a relic of that great institution known as feudalism, M. d'Espard deserved respectful admiration. If he believed himself to be by blood the superior of other men, he also believed in all the obligations of nobility; he had the virtues and the strength it demands. He had brought up his children in his own principles, and taught them from the cradle the religion of their caste. A deep sense of their own dignity, pride of name, the conviction that they were by birth great, gave rise in them to a kingly pride, the courage of knights, and the protecting kindness of a baronial lord; their manners, harmonizing with their notions, would have become princes, and offended all the world of the Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genève—a world, above all others, of equality, where every one believed that M. d'Espard was ruined, and where all, from the lowest to the highest, refused the privileges of nobility to a nobleman without money, because they all were ready to allow an enriched bourgeois to usurp them. Thus the lack of communion between this family and other persons was as much moral as it was physical.

In the father and the children alike, their personality harmonized with the spirit within. M. d'Espard, at this time about fifty, might have sat as a model to represent the aristocracy of birth in the nineteenth century. He was slight and fair; there was in the outline and general expression of his



face a native distinction which spoke of lofty sentiments, but it bore the impress of a deliberate coldness which commanded respect a little too decidedly. His aquiline nose bent at the tip from left to right, a slight crookedness which was not devoid of grace; his blue eyes, his high forehead, prominent enough at the brows to form a thick ridge that checked the light and shaded his eyes, all indicated a spirit of rectitude capable of perseverance and perfect loyalty, while it gave a singular look to his countenance. This pent-house forehead might, in fact, hint at a touch of madness, and his thick-knitted eyebrows added to the apparent eccentricity. He had the white well-kept hands of a gentleman; his foot was high and narrow. His hesitating speech—not merely as to his pronunciation, which was that of a stammerer, but also in the expression of his ideas, his thought, and language—produced on the mind of the hearer the impression of a man who, in familiar phraseology, comes and goes, feels his way, tries everything, breaks off his gestures, and finishes nothing. This defect was purely superficial, and in contrast with the decisiveness of a firmly-set mouth, and the strongly-marked character of his physiognomy. His rather jerky gait matched his mode of speech. These peculiarities helped to affirm his supposed insanity. In spite of his elegant appearance, he was systematically parsimonious in his personal expenses, and wore the same black frockcoat for three or four years, brushed with extreme care by his old manservant.

As to the children, they both were handsome, and endowed with a grace which did not exclude an expression of aristocratic disdain. They had the bright coloring, the clear eye, the transparent flesh which reveal habits of purity, regularity of life, and a due proportion of work and play. They both had black hair and blue eyes, and a twist in their nose, like their father; but their mother, perhaps, had transmitted to them the dignity of speech, of look and mien, which are hereditary in the Blamont-Chauvrys. Their voices, as clear

as crystal, had an emotional quality, the softness which proves so seductive; they had, in short, the voice a woman would willingly listen to after feeling the flame of their looks. But, above all, they had the modesty of pride, a chaste reserve, a *touch-me-not* which at a maturer age might have seemed intentional shyness, so much did their demeanor inspire a wish to know them. The elder, Comte Clément de Nègrepelisse, was close upon his sixteenth year. For the last two years he had ceased to wear the pretty English round jacket which his brother, Vicomte Camille d'Espard, still wore. The Count, who for the last six months went no more to the Collège Henri IV., was dressed in the style of a young man enjoying the first pleasures of fashion. His father had not wished to condemn him to a year's useless study of philosophy; he was trying to give his knowledge some consistency by the study of transcendental mathematics. At the same time, the Marquis was having him taught Eastern languages, the international law of Europe, heraldry, and history from the original sources—charters, early documents, and collections of edicts. Camille had lately begun to study rhetoric.

The day when Popinot arranged to go to question M. d'Espard was a Thursday, a holiday. At about nine in the morning, before their father was awake, the brothers were playing in the garden. Clément was finding it hard to refuse his brother, who was anxious to go to the shooting gallery for the first time, and who begged him to second his request to the Marquis. The Viscount always rather took advantage of his weakness, and was very fond of wrestling with his brother. So the couple were quarreling and fighting in play like schoolboys. As they ran in the garden, chasing each other, they made so much noise as to wake their father, who came to the window without their perceiving him in the heat of the fray. The Marquis amused himself with watching his two children twisted together like snakes, their faces flushed by the exertion of their strength; their complexion was rose and

white, their eyes flashed sparks, their limbs writhed like cords in the fire ; they fell, sprang up again, and caught each other like athletes in a circus, affording their father one of those moments of happiness which would make amends for the keenest anxieties of a busy life. Two other persons, one on the second and one on the first floor, were also looking into the garden, and saying that the old madman was amusing himself by making his children fight. Immediately a number of heads appeared at the windows ; the Marquis, noticing them, called to his sons, who at once climbed up to the window and jumped into his room, and Clément obtained the permission asked by Camille.

All through the house every one was talking of the Marquis' new form of insanity. When Popinot arrived at about twelve o'clock, accompanied by his clerk, the portress, when he asked for M. d'Espard, conducted him to the third floor, telling him "as how M. d'Espard, no longer ago than that very morning, had set on his two children to fight, and laughed like the monster he was on seeing the younger biting the elder till he bled, and as how no doubt he longed to see them kill each other. Don't ask me the reason why," she added ; "he doesn't know himself !"

Just as the woman spoke these decisive words, she had brought the judge to the landing on the third floor, face to face with a door covered with notices announcing the successive numbers of "The Picturesque History of China." The muddy floor, the dirty banisters, the door where the printers had left their marks, the dilapidated window, and the ceiling on which the apprentices had amused themselves with drawing monstrosities with the smoky flare of their tallow dips, the piles of paper and litter heaped up in the corners, intentionally or from sheer neglect—in short, every detail of the picture lying before his eyes—agreed so well with the facts alleged by the Marquise that the judge, in spite of his impartiality, could not help believing them.

"There you are, gentlemen," said the porter's wife; "there is the malefactor, where the Chinese swallow up enough to feed the whole neighborhood."

The clerk looked at the judge with a smile, and Popinot found it hard to keep his countenance. They went together into the outer room, where sat an old man, who, no doubt, performed the functions of office clerk, shopman, and cashier. This old man was the *Maître Jacques* of China. Along the walls ran long shelves, on which the published numbers lay in piles. A partition in wood, with a grating lined with green curtains, cut off the end of the room, forming a private office. A till with a slit to admit or disgorge crown-pieces indicated the cash-desk.

"M. d'Espard?" said Popinot, addressing the man, who wore a gray blouse.

The shopman opened the door into the next room, where the lawyer and his companion saw a venerable old man, white-headed and simply dressed, wearing the Cross of Saint Louis, seated at a desk. He ceased comparing some sheets of colored prints to look up at the two visitors. This room was an unpretentious office, full of books and proof-sheets. There was a black wood table at which some one, at the moment absent, no doubt was accustomed to work.

"The Marquis d'Espard?" said Popinot.

"No, monsieur," said the old man, rising; "what do you want with him?" he added, coming forward, and showing by his demeanor the dignified manners and habits due to a gentlemanly education.

"We wish to speak to him on business exclusively personal to himself," replied Popinot.

"D'Espard, here are some gentlemen who want to see you," then said the old man, going into the rear room, where the Marquis was sitting by the fire reading the newspaper.

This innermost room had a shabby carpet, the windows

were hung with gray Holland curtains; the furniture consisted of a few mahogany chairs, two armchairs, a desk with a revolving front, an ordinary office table, and, on the chimney-shelf, a dingy clock and two old candlesticks. The old man led the way for Popinot and his registrar, and pulled forward two chairs, as though he were master of the place; M. d'Espard left it to him. After the preliminary civilities, during which the judge watched the supposed lunatic, the Marquis naturally asked what was the object of this visit. On this Popinot glanced significantly at the old gentleman and the Marquis.

"I believe, Monsieur le Marquis," said he, "that the character of my functions and the inquiry that has brought me here make it desirable that we should be alone, though it is understood by law that in such cases the inquiries have a sort of family publicity. I am judge of the Inferior Court of Appeal for the Department of the Seine, and charged by the president with the duty of examining you as to certain facts set forth in a petition for a commission in lunacy on the part of the Marquise d'Espard.

The old man withdrew, When the lawyer and the Marquis were alone, the clerk shut the door, and seated himself unceremoniously at the office table, where he laid out his papers and prepared to take down his notes. Popinot had still kept his eye on M. d'Espard; he was watching the effect on him of this crude statement, so painful for a man in full possession of his reason. The Marquis d'Espard, whose face was usually pale, as are those of fair men, suddenly turned scarlet with anger; he trembled for an instant, sat down, laid his paper on the chimney-piece, and looked down. In a moment he had recovered his gentlemanly dignity, and looked steadily at the judge, as if to read in his countenance the indications of his character.

"How is it, monsieur," he asked, "that I have had no notice of such a petition?"

"Monsieur le Marquis, persons on whom such a commission is held, not being supposed to have the use of their reason, any notice of the petition is unnecessary. The duty of the court chiefly consists in verifying the allegations of the petitioner."

"Nothing can be fairer," replied the Marquis. "Well, then, monsieur, be so good as to tell me what I ought to do——"

"You have only to answer my questions, omitting nothing. However delicate the reasons may be which may have led you to act in such a manner as to give Madame d'Espard a pretext for her petition, speak without fear. It is unnecessary to assure you that lawyers know their duties, and that in such cases the profoundest secrecy——"

"Monsieur," said the Marquis, whose face expressed the sincerest pain, "if my explanations should lead to any blame being attached to Madame d'Espard's conduct, what will be the result?"

"The court may add its censure to its reasons for its decision."

"Is such censure optional? If I were to stipulate with you, before replying, that nothing should be said that could annoy Madame d'Espard in the event of your report being in my favor, would the court take my request into consideration?"

The judge looked at the Marquis, and the two men exchanged sentiments of equal magnanimity.

"Noël," said Popinot to his registrar, "go into the other room. If you can be of use, I will call you in. If, as I am inclined to think," he went on, speaking to the Marquis when the clerk had gone out, "I find that there is some misunderstanding in this case, I can promise you, monsieur, that on your application the court will act with due courtesy."

"There is a leading fact put forward by Madame d'Espard, the most serious of all, of which I must beg for an explana-

tion," said the judge after a pause. "It refers to the dissipation of your fortune to the advantage of a certain Madame Jeanrenaud, the widow of a bargemaster—or rather, to that of her son, Colonel Jeanrenaud, for whom you are said to have procured an appointment, to have exhausted your influence with the King, and at last to have extended such protection as secures him a good marriage. The petition suggests that such a friendship is more devoted than any feelings, even those which morality must disapprove——"

A sudden flush crimsoned the Marquis' face and forehead, tears even started to his eyes, for his eyelashes were wet, then wholesome pride crushed the emotions, which in a man are accounted a weakness.

"To tell you the truth, monsieur," said the Marquis, in a broken voice, "you place me in a strange dilemma. The motives of my conduct were to have died with me. To reveal them I must disclose to you some secret wounds, must place the honor of my family in your keeping, and must speak of myself, a delicate matter, as you will fully understand. I hope, monsieur, that it will all remain a secret between us. You will, no doubt, be able to find in the formulas of the law one which will allow of judgment being pronounced without any betrayal of my confidences."

"So far as that goes, it is perfectly possible, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Some time after my marriage," said M. d'Espard, "my wife having run into considerable expenses, I was obliged to have recourse to borrowing. You know what was the position of noble families during the Revolution; I had not been able to keep a steward or a man of business. Nowadays gentlemen are for the most part obliged to manage their affairs themselves. Most of my title-deeds had been brought to Paris, from Languedoc, Provence, or le Comtat, by my father, who dreaded, and not without reason, the inquisition which family title-deeds, and what were then styled the 'parchments' of the

privileged class, brought down on the individual owners of landed estates.

"Our name is Nègrepelisse; d'Espard is a title acquired in the time of Henry IV. by a marriage which brought us the estates and titles of the house of d'Espard, on condition of our bearing an escutcheon of pretence on our coat-of-arms, those of the house of d'Espard, an old family of Béarn, connected in the female line with that of Albret: quarterly, paly of or and sable; and azure two griffins' claws armed, gules in saltire, with the famous motto *Des partem leonis*. At the time of this alliance we lost Nègrepelisse, a little town which was as famous during the religious struggles as was my ancestor who then bore the name. Captain de Nègrepelisse was ruined by the burning of all his property, for the Protestants did not spare a friend of Montluc's.

"The Crown was unjust to M. de Nègrepelisse; he received neither a marshal's bâton, nor a post as governor, nor any indemnity; King Charles IX., who was fond of him, died without being able to reward him; Henry IV. arranged his marriage with Mademoiselle d'Espard, and secured him the estates of that house, but all those of the Nègrepelisses had already passed into the hands of his creditors.

"My great-grandfather, the Marquis d'Espard, was, like me, placed early in life at the head of his family by the death of his father, who, after dissipating his wife's fortune, left his son nothing but the entailed estates of the d'Espards, burdened with a jointure. The young Marquis was all the more straitened for money because he held a post at Court. Being in great favor with Louis XIV., the King's good-will brought him a fortune. But here, monsieur, a blot stained our escutcheon, an unconfessed and horrible stain of blood and disgrace which I am making it my business to wipe out. I discovered the secret among the deeds relating to the estate of Nègrepelisse and the packets of letters."

At this solemn moment the Marquis spoke without hesita-



tion or any of the repetition habitual with him ; but it is a matter of common observation that persons who, in ordinary life, are afflicted with these two defects, are freed from them as soon as any passionate emotion underlies their speech.

"The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes was decreed," he went on. "You are no doubt aware, monsieur, that this was an opportunity for many favorites to make their fortunes. Louis XIV. bestowed on the magnates about his Court the confiscated lands of those Protestant families who did not take the prescribed steps for the sale of their property. Some persons in high favor went 'Protestant-hunting,' as the phrase was. I have ascertained beyond a doubt that the fortune enjoyed to this day by two ducal families is derived from lands seized from hapless merchants.

"I will not attempt to explain to you, a man of law, all the manœuvres employed to entrap the refugees who had large fortunes to carry away. It is enough to say that the lands of Nègrepelisse, comprising twenty-two churches and rights over the town, and those of Gravenges which had formerly belonged to us, were at that time in the hands of a Protestant family. My grandfather recovered them by gift from Louis XIV. This gift was effected by documents hall-marked by atrocious iniquity. The owner of these two estates, thinking he would be able to return, had gone through the form of a sale, and was going to Switzerland to join his family, whom he had sent in advance. He wished, no doubt, to take advantage of every delay granted by the law, so as to settle the concerns of his business.

"This man was arrested by order of the Governor, the trustee confessed the truth, the poor merchant was hanged, and my ancestor had the two estates. I would gladly have been able to ignore the share he took in the plot ; but the Governor was his uncle on the mother's side, and I have unfortunately read the letter in which he begged him to apply to Deodatus, the name agreed upon by the Court to designate the King. In

this letter there is a tone of jocosity with reference to the victim, which filled me with horror. In the end, the sums of money sent by the refugee family to ransom the poor man's life were kept by the Governor, who dispatched the merchant all the same."

The Marquis paused, as though the memory of it were still too heavy for him to bear.

"This unfortunate family were named Jeanrenaud," he went on. "The name is enough to account for my conduct. I could never think without keen pain of the secret disgrace that weighed on my family. That fortune enabled my grandfather to marry a demoiselle de Navarreins-Lansac, heiress to the younger branch of that house, who were at that time much richer than the elder branch of the Navarreins. My father thus became one of the largest landowners in the kingdom. He was able to marry my mother, a Grandlieu of the younger branch. Though ill-gotten, this property has been singularly profitable.

"For my part, being determined to remedy the mischief, I wrote to Switzerland, and knew no peace till I was on the traces of the Protestant victim's heirs. At last I discovered that the Jeanrenauds, reduced to abject want, had left Fribourg and returned to live in France. Finally, I found in M. Jeanrenaud, lieutenant in a cavalry regiment under Napoleon, the sole heir of this unhappy family. In my eyes, monsieur, the rights of the Jeanrenauds were clear. To establish a prescriptive right is it not necessary that there should have been some possibility of proceeding against those who are in the enjoyment of it? To whom could these refugees have appealed? Their court of justice was on high, or rather, monsieur, it was here," and the Marquis struck his hand on his heart. "I did not choose that my children should be able to think of me as I have thought of my father and of my ancestors. I aim at leaving them an unblemished inheritance and escutcheon. I did not choose that nobility should be a

lie in my person. And, after all, politically speaking, ought those *émigrés* who are now appealing against revolutionary confiscations, to keep the property derived from antecedent confiscations by positive crimes?

“I found in M. Jeanrenaud and his mother the most perverse honesty; to hear them you would suppose that they were robbing me. In spite of all I could say, they will accept no more than the value of the lands at the time when the King bestowed them on my family. The price was settled between us at the sum of eleven hundred thousand francs, which I was to pay at my convenience and without interest. To achieve this I had to forego my income for a long time. And then, monsieur, began the destruction of some illusions I had allowed myself as to Madame d'Espard's character. When I proposed to her that we should leave Paris and go into the country, where we could live respected on half of her income, and so more rapidly complete a restitution of which I spoke to her without going into the more serious details, Madame d'Espard treated me as a madman. I then understood my wife's real character. She would have approved of my grandfather's conduct without a scruple, and have laughed at the Huguenots. Terrified by her coldness, and her little affection for her children, whom she abandoned to me without a regret, I determined to leave her the command of her fortune, after paying our common debts. It was no business of hers, as she told me, to pay for my follies. As I then had not enough to live on and pay for my sons' education, I determined to educate them myself, to make them gentlemen and men of feeling. By investing my money in the funds I have been enabled to pay off my obligation sooner than I had dared to hope, for I took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the improvement in prices. If I had kept four thousand francs a year for my boys and myself, I could only have paid off twenty thousand crowns a year, and it would have taken almost eighteen years to achieve my freedom. As it is, I

have lately repaid the whole of the eleven hundred thousand francs that were due. Thus I enjoy the happiness of having made this restitution without doing my children the smallest wrong.

"These, monsieur, are the reasons for the payments made to Madame Jeanrenaud and her son."

"So Madame d'Espard knew the motives of your retirement?" said the judge, controlling the emotion he felt at this narrative.

"Yes, monsieur."

Popinot gave an expressive shrug; he rose and opened the door into the next room.

"Noël, you can go," said he to his clerk.

"Monsieur," he went on, "though what you have told me is enough to enlighten me thoroughly, I should like to hear what you have to say to the other facts put forward in the petition. For instance, you are here carrying on a business such as is not habitually undertaken by a man of rank."

"We cannot discuss that matter here," said the Marquis, signing to the judge to quit the room. "Nouvion," said he to the old man, "I am going down to my rooms; the children will soon be in; dine with us."

"Then, Monsieur le Marquis," said Popinot on the stairs, "that is not your apartment!"

"No, monsieur; I took those rooms for the office of this undertaking. You see," and he pointed to an advertisement sheet, "the 'History' is being brought out by one of the most respectable firms in Paris, and not by me."

The Marquis showed the lawyer into the ground-floor rooms, saying, "This is my apartment."

Popinot was quite touched by the poetry, not aimed at but pervading this dwelling. The weather was lovely, the windows were open, the air from the garden brought in a wholesome earthy smell, the sunshine brightened and gilded the woodwork, of a rather gloomy brown. At the sight

Popinot made up his mind that a madman would hardly be capable of inventing the tender harmony of which he was at that moment conscious.

"I should like just such an apartment," thought he. "You think of leaving this part of the town?" he inquired.

"I hope so," replied the Marquis. "But I shall remain till my younger son has finished his studies, and till the children's character is thoroughly formed, before introducing them to the world and to their mother's circle. Indeed, after giving them the solid information they possess, I intend to complete it by taking them to travel to the capitals of Europe, that they may see men and things, and become accustomed to speak the languages they have learned. And, monsieur," he went on, giving the judge a chair in the drawing-room, "I could not discuss the book on China with you, in the presence of an old friend of my family, the Comte de Novion, who, having emigrated, has returned to France without any fortune whatever, and who is my partner in this concern, less for my profit than his. Without telling him what my motives were, I explained to him that I was as poor as he, but that I had enough money to start a speculation in which he might be usefully employed. My tutor was the Abbé Grozier, whom Charles X. on my recommendation appointed Keeper of the Books at the Arsenal, which were returned to that Prince when he was still monsieur. The Abbé Grozier was deeply learned with regard to China, its manners and customs; he made me heir to this knowledge at an age when it is difficult not to become a fanatic for the things we learn. At five-and-twenty I knew Chinese, and I confess I have never been able to check myself in an exclusive admiration for that nation, who conquered their conquerors, whose annals extend back indisputably to a period more remote than mythological or Biblical times, who by their immutable institutions have preserved the integrity of their empire, whose monuments are gigantic, whose administration is perfect, among whom

revolutions are impossible, who have regarded ideal beauty as a barren element in art, who have carried luxury and industry to such a pitch that we cannot outdo them in anything, while they are our equals in things where we believe ourselves superior.

“Still, monsieur, though I often make a jest of comparing China with the present condition of European states, I am not a Chinaman, I am a French gentleman. If you entertain any doubts as to the financial side of this undertaking, I can prove to you that at this moment we have two thousand five hundred subscribers to this work, which is literary, iconographical, statistical, and religious; its importance has been generally appreciated; our subscribers belong to every nation in Europe, we have but twelve hundred in France. Our book will cost about three hundred francs, and the Comte de Nouvion will derive from it from six to seven thousand francs a year, for his comfort was the real motive of the undertaking. For my part, I aimed only at the possibility of affording my children some pleasures. The hundred thousand francs I have made, quite in spite of myself, will pay for their fencing lessons, horses, dress, and theatres, pay the masters who teach them accomplishments, procure them canvases to spoil, the books they may wish to buy, in short, all the little fancies which a father finds so much pleasure in gratifying. If I had been compelled to refuse these indulgences to my poor boys, who are so good and work so hard, the sacrifice I made to the honor of my name would have been doubly trying and more painful to me.

“In point of fact, the twelve years I have spent in retirement from the world to educate my children have led to my being completely forgotten at Court. I have given up the career of politics; I have lost my historical fortune, and all the distinctions which I might have acquired and bequeathed to my children; but our house will have lost nothing; my boys will be men of mark. Though I have missed the senator-

ship, they will win it nobly by devoting themselves to the affairs of the country, and doing such service as is not soon forgotten. While purifying the past record of my family, I have insured it a glorious future; and is not that to have achieved a noble task, though in secret and without glory? And now, monsieur, have you any other explanations to ask of me?"

At this instant the tramp of horses was heard in the courtyard.

"Here they are!" said the Marquis. In a moment the two lads, fashionably but plainly dressed, came into the room, booted, spurred, and gloved, and flourishing their riding-whips. Their beaming faces brought in the freshness of the outer air; they were brilliant with health. They both grasped their father's hand, giving him a look, as friends do, a glance of unspoken affection, and then they bowed coldly to the lawyer. Popinot felt that it was quite unnecessary to question the Marquis as to his relations towards his sons.

"Have you enjoyed yourselves?" asked the Marquis.

"Yes, father; I knocked down six dolls in twelve shots at the first trial!" cried Camille.

"And where did you ride?"

"In the Bois; we saw our mother."

"Did she stop?"

"We were riding so fast just then that I daresay she did not see us," replied the young Count.

"But, then, why did you not go to speak to her?"

"I fancy I have noticed, father, that she does not care that we should speak to her in public," said Clément, in an undertone. "We are a little too big."

The judge's hearing was keen enough to catch these words, which brought a cloud to the Marquis' brow. Popinot took pleasure in contemplating the picture of the father and his boys. His eyes went back with a sense of pathos to M. d'Espard's face; his features, his expression, and his manner

all expressed honesty in its noblest aspect, intellectual and chivalrous honesty, nobility in all its beauty.

"You—you see, monsieur," said the Marquis, and his hesitation had returned, "you see that Justice may look in—in here at any time—yes, at any time—here. If there is anybody crazy, it can only be the children—the children—who are a little crazy about their father, and the father who is very crazy about his children—but that sort of madness rings true."

At this juncture Madame Jeanrenaud's voice was heard in the anteroom, and the good woman came bustling in, in spite of the manservant's remonstrances.

"I take no roundabout ways, I can tell you!" she exclaimed. "Yes, Monsieur le Marquis, I want to speak to you, this very minute," she went on, with a comprehensive bow to the company. "By George, and I am too late as it is, since monsieur the criminal judge is before me."

"Criminal!" cried the two boys.

"Good reason why I did not find you at your own house, since you are here. Well, well! the law is always to the fore when there is mischief brewing. I came, Monsieur le Marquis, to tell you that my son and I are of one mind to give you everything back, since our honor is threatened. My son and I, we had rather give you back everything than cause you the smallest trouble. My word, they must be as stupid as pans without handles to call you a lunatic——"

"A lunatic! My father?" exclaimed the boys, clinging to the Marquis. "What is this?"

"Silence, madame," said Popinot.

"Children, leave us," said the Marquis.

The two boys went into the garden without a word, but very much alarmed.

"Madame," said the judge, "the moneys paid to you by Monsieur le Marquis were legally due, though given to you in virtue of a very far-reaching theory of honesty. If all the



people possessed of confiscated goods, by whatever cause, even if acquired by treachery, were compelled to make restitution every hundred and fifty years, there would be few legitimate owners in France. The possessions of Jacques Cœur enriched twenty noble families; the confiscations pronounced by the English to the advantage of their adherents at the time when they held a part of France made the fortune of several princely houses.

"Our laws allow M. d'Espard to dispose of his income without accounting for it, or suffering him to be accused of its misapplication. A commission in lunacy can only be granted when a man's actions are devoid of reason; but in this case the remittances made to you have a reason based on the most sacred and most honorable motives. Hence you may keep it all without remorse, and leave the world to misinterpret a noble action. In Paris, the highest virtue is the object of the foulest calumny. It is, unfortunately, the present condition of society that makes the Marquis' actions sublime. For the honor of my country, I would that such deeds were regarded as a matter of course; but, as things are, I am forced by comparison to look upon M. d'Espard as a man to whom a crown should be awarded, rather than that he should be threatened with a commission in lunacy.

"In the course of a long professional career, I have seen and heard nothing which has touched me more deeply than that I have just seen and heard. But it is not extraordinary that virtue should wear its noblest aspect when it is practiced by men of the highest class.

"Having heard me express myself in this way, I hope, Monsieur le Marquis, that you feel certain of my silence, and that you will not for a moment be uneasy as to the decision pronounced in the case—if it comes before the court."

"There, now! Well said," cried Madame Jeanrenaud "That is something like a judge! Look here, my dear sir, I would hug you if I were not so ugly; you speak like a book."

The Marquis held out his hand to Popinot, who gently pressed it with a look full of sympathetic comprehension at this great man in private life, and the Marquis responded with a pleasant smile. These two natures, both so large and full—one commonplace but divinely kind, the other lofty and sublime—had fallen into unison gently, without a jar, without a flash of passion, as though two pure lights had been merged into one. The father of a whole district felt himself worthy to grasp the hand of this man who was doubly noble, and the Marquis felt in the depths of his soul an instinct that told him that the judge's hand was one of those from which the treasures of inexhaustible beneficence perennially flow.

"Monsieur le Marquis," added Popinot, with a bow, "I am happy to be able to tell you that, from the first words of this inquiry, I regarded my clerk as quite unnecessary."

He went close to M. d'Espard, led him into the window-bay, and said: "It is time that you should return home, monsieur. I believe that Madame la Marquise has acted in this matter under an influence which you ought at once to counteract."

Popinot withdrew; he looked back several times as he crossed the courtyard, touched by the recollection of the scene. It was one of those which take root in the memory to blossom again in certain hours when the soul seeks consolation.

"Those rooms would just suit me," said he to himself as he reached home. "If M. d'Espard leaves them, I will take up his lease."

The next day, at about ten in the morning, Popinot, who had written out his report the previous evening, made his way to the Palais de Justice, intending to have prompt and righteous justice done. As he went into the robing-room to put on his gown and bands, the usher told him that the president of his court begged him to attend in his private room, where he was waiting for him. Popinot forthwith obeyed.

"Good morning, my dear Popinot," said the president, "I have been waiting for you."

"Why, Monsieur le Président, is anything wrong?"

"A mere silly trifle," said the president. "The Keeper of the Seals, with whom I had the honor of dining yesterday, led me apart into a corner. He had heard that you had been to tea with Madame d'Espard, in whose case you were employed to make inquiries. He gave me to understand that it would be as well that you should not sit on this case——"

"But, Monsieur le Président, I can prove that I left Madame d'Espard's house at the moment when tea was brought in. And my conscience——"

"Yes, yes; the whole bench, the two courts, all the profession know you. I need not repeat what I said about you to his eminence; but you know, 'Cæsar's wife must not be suspected.' So we shall not make this foolish trifle a matter of discipline, but only of the proprieties. Between ourselves, it is not on your account, but on that of the bench."

"But, indeed, monsieur, if you only just knew the kind of woman——" said the judge, trying to pull his report out of his pocket.

"I am perfectly certain that you have proceeded in this matter with the strictest independence of judgment. I myself, in the provinces, have often taken more than a cup of tea with the people I had to try; but the fact that the Keeper of the Seals should have mentioned it, and that you might be talked about, is enough to make the court avoid any discussion of the matter. Any conflict with public opinion must always be dangerous for a constitutional body, even when the right is on its side against the public, because their weapons are not equal. Journalism may say or suppose anything, and our dignity forbids us even to reply. In fact, I have spoken of the matter to your president, and M. Camusot has been appointed in your place on your retirement, which you will signify. It is a family matter, so to speak. And I now beg

you to signify your retirement from the case as a personal favor. To make up, you will get the Cross of the Legion of Honor, which has so long been due to you. I make that my business."

When he saw M. Camusot, a judge recently called to Paris from a provincial court of the same class, as he went forward bowing to the judge and the president, Popinot could not repress an ironical smile. This pale, fair young man, full of covert ambition, looked ready to hang and unhang, at the pleasure of any earthly king, the innocent and the guilty alike, and to follow the example of a Laubardemont rather than that of a Molé.

Popinot withdrew with a bow; he scorned to deny the lying accusation that had been brought against him.

PARIS, *February, 1836.*



## THE ATHEIST'S MASS.

(*La Messe de l'Athée.*)

Translated by CLARA BELL.

*This is dedicated to Auguste Borget by his friend De Balzac.*

BIANCHON, a physician to whom science owes a fine system of theoretical physiology, and who, while still young, made himself a celebrity in the medical school of Paris, that central luminary to which European doctors do homage, practiced surgery for a long time before he took up medicine. His earliest studies were guided by one of the greatest of French surgeons, the illustrious Desplein, who flashed across science like a meteor. By the consensus even of his enemies, he took with him to the tomb an incommunicable method. Like all men of genius, he had no heirs; he carried everything in him, and carried it away with him. The glory of a surgeon is like that of an actor; they live only so long as they are alive, and their talent leaves no trace when they are gone. Actors and surgeons, like great singers too, like the executants who by their performance increase the power of music tenfold, are all the heroes of a moment.

Desplein is a case in proof of this resemblance in the destinies of such transient genius. His name, yesterday so famous, to-day almost forgotten, will survive in his special department without crossing its limits. For must there not be some extraordinary circumstances to exalt the name of a professor from the history of science to the general history of the human race? Had Desplein that universal command of knowledge which makes a man the living word, the great figure of his age? Desplein had a godlike eye; he saw into the sufferer and his malady by an intuition, natural or acquired, which enabled him to grasp the diagnostics peculiar

(386)

to the individual, to determine the very time, the hour, the minute when an operation should be performed, making due allowance for atmospheric conditions and peculiarities of individual temperament. To proceed thus, hand in hand with nature, had he then studied the constant assimilation by living beings, of the elements contained in the atmosphere, or yielded by the earth to man who absorbs them, deriving from them a particular expression of life? Did he work it all out by the power of deduction and analogy, to which we owe the genius of Cuvier? Be this as it may, this man was in all the secrets of the human frame; he knew it in the past and in the future, emphasizing the present.

But did he epitomize all science in his own person as Hippocrates did and Galen and Aristotle? Did he guide a whole school towards new worlds? No. Though it is impossible to deny that this persistent observer of human chemistry possessed the antique science of the Magi, that is to say, knowledge of the elements in fusion, the causes of life, life antecedent to life, and what it must be in its incubation or ever it *is*, it must be confessed that, unfortunately, everything in him was purely personal. Isolated during his life by his egoism, that egoism is now suicidal of his glory. On his tomb there is no proclaiming statue to repeat to posterity the mysteries which genius seeks out at its own cost.

But perhaps Desplein's genius was answerable for his beliefs, and for that reason mortal. To him the terrestrial atmosphere was a generative envelope; he saw the earth as an egg within its shell; and not being able to determine whether the egg or the hen first was, he would not recognize either the cock or the egg. He believed neither in the antecedent animal nor the surviving spirit of man. Desplein had no doubts; he was positive. His bold and unqualified atheism was like that of many scientific men, the best men in the world, but invincible atheists—atheists such as religious people declare to be impossible. This opinion could scarcely exist

otherwise in a man who was accustomed from his youth to dissect the creature above all others—before, during, and after life; to hunt through all his organs without ever finding the individual soul, which is indispensable to religious theory. When he detected a cerebral centre, a nervous centre, and a centre for aerating the blood—the two first so perfectly complementary that in the latter years of his life he came to a conviction that the sense of hearing is not absolutely necessary for hearing, nor the sense of sight for seeing, and that the solar plexus could supply their place without any possibility of doubt—Desplein, thus finding two souls in man, confirmed his atheism by this fact, though it is no evidence against God. This man died, it is said, in final impenitence, as do, unfortunately, many noble geniuses, whom God may forgive.

The life of this man, great as he was, was marred by many meannesses, to use the expression employed by his enemies, who were anxious to diminish his glory, but which it would be more proper to call apparent contradictions. Envious people and fools, having no knowledge of the determinations by which superior spirits are moved, seize at once on superficial inconsistencies, to formulate an accusation and so to pass sentence on them. If, subsequently, the proceedings thus attacked are crowned with success, showing the correlation of the preliminaries and the results, a few of the vanguard of calumnies always survive. In our own day, for instance, Napoleon was condemned by our contemporaries when he spread his eagle's wings to alight in England: only 1822 could explain 1804 and the flatboats at Boulogne.

As, in Desplein, his glory and science were invulnerable, his enemies attacked his odd moods and his temper, whereas, in fact, he was simply characterized by what the English call eccentricity. Sometimes very handsomely dressed, like Cr billon the tragical, he would suddenly affect extreme indifference as to what he wore; he was sometimes seen in a carriage,

and sometimes on foot. By turns rough and kind, harsh and covetous on the surface, but capable of offering his whole fortune to his exiled masters—who did him the honor of accepting it for a few days—no man ever gave rise to such contradictory judgments. Although to obtain a black ribbon, which physicians ought not to intrigue for, he was capable of dropping a prayer-book out of his pocket at Court, in his heart he mocked at everything; he had a deep contempt for men, after studying them from above and below, after detecting their genuine expression when performing the most solemn and the meanest acts of their lives.

The qualities of a great man are often federative. If among these colossal spirits one has more talent than wit, his wit is still superior to that of a man of whom it is simply stated that "he is witty." Genius always presupposes moral insight. This insight may be applied to a special subject; but he who can see a flower must be able to see the sun. The man who on hearing a diplomate he had saved ask, "How is the Emperor?" could say, "The courtier is alive; the man will follow!"—that man is not merely a surgeon or a physician, he is prodigiously witty also. Hence a patient and diligent student of human nature will admit Desplein's exorbitant pretensions, and believe—as he himself believed—that he might have been no less great as a minister than he was as a surgeon.

Among the riddles which Desplein's life presents to many of his contemporaries, we have chosen one of the most interesting, because the answer is to be found at the end of the narrative, and will avenge him for some foolish charges.

Of all the students in Desplein's hospital, Horace Bianchon was one of those to whom he most warmly attached himself. Before being a house surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, Horace Bianchon had been a medical student lodging in a squalid boarding-house in the *Quartier Latin*, known as the Maison Vauquer. This poor young man had felt there the gnawing of that burning poverty which is a sort of crucible from which



great talents are to emerge as pure and incorruptible as diamonds, which may be subjected to any shock without being crushed. In the fierce fire of their unbridled passions they acquire the most impeccable honesty, and get into the habit of fighting the battles which await genius with the constant work by which they coerce their cheated appetites.

Horace was an upright young fellow, incapable of tergiversation on a matter of honor, going to the point without waste of words, and as ready to pledge his cloak for a friend as to give him his time and his night hours. Horace, in short, was one of those friends who are never anxious as to what they may get in return for what they give, feeling sure that they will in their turn get more than they give. Most of his friends felt for him that deeply-seated respect which is inspired by unostentatious virtue, and many of them dreaded his censure. But Horace made no pedantic display of his qualities. He was neither a puritan nor a preacher; he could swear with a grace as he gave his advice, and was always ready for a jollification when occasion offered. A jolly companion, not more prudish than a trooper, as frank and outspoken—not as a sailor, for nowadays sailors are wily diplomates—but as an honest man who has nothing in his life to hide, he walked with his head erect, and a mind content. In short, to put the facts into a word, Horace was the Pylades of more than one Orestes—creditors being regarded as the nearest modern equivalent to the Furies of the ancients.

He carried his poverty with the cheerfulness which is perhaps one of the chief elements of courage, and, like all people who have nothing, he made very few debts. As sober as a camel and active as a stag, he was steadfast in his ideas and his conduct.

The happy phase of Bianchon's life began on the day when the famous surgeon had proof of the qualities and the defects which, these no less than those, make Doctor Horace Bianchon doubly dear to his friends. When a leading clinical

practitioner takes a young man to his bosom, that young man has, as they say, his foot in the stirrup. Desplein did not fail to take Bianchon as his assistant to wealthy houses, where some complimentary fee almost always found its way into the student's pocket, and where the mysteries of Paris life were insensibly revealed to the young provincial; he kept him at his side when a consultation was to be held, and gave him occupation; sometimes he would send him to a watering-place with a rich patient; in fact, he was making a practice for him. The consequence was that in the course of time the king of surgery had a devoted ally. These two men—one at the summit of honor and of his science, enjoying an immense fortune and an immense reputation; the other an humble Omega, having neither fortune nor fame—became intimate friends.

The great Desplein told his house surgeon everything; the disciple knew whether such or such a woman had sat on a chair near the master, or on the famous couch in Desplein's surgery, on which he slept; Bianchon knew the mysteries of that temperament, a compound of the lion and the bull, which at last expanded and enlarged beyond measure the great man's torso, and caused his death by degeneration of the heart. He studied the eccentricities of that busy life, the schemes of that sordid avarice, the hopes of the politician who lurked behind the man of science; he was able to foresee the mortifications that awaited the only sentiment that lay hid in a heart that was steeled, but not of steel.

One day Bianchon spoke to Desplein of a poor water-carrier of the Saint-Jacques district, who had a horrible disease caused by fatigue and want; this wretched Auvergnat had had nothing but potatoes to eat during the dreadful winter of 1822. Desplein left all his visits, and, at the risk of killing his horse, he rushed off, followed by Bianchon, to the poor man's dwelling, and saw, himself, to his being removed to a sick house, founded by the famous Dubois in the Faubourg

Saint-Denis. Then he went to attend the man, and when he had cured him he gave him the necessary sum to buy a horse and a water-barrel. This Auvergnat distinguished himself by an amusing action. One of his friends fell ill, and he took him at once to Desplein, saying to his benefactor, "I could not have borne to let him go to any one else!"

Rough customer as he was, Desplein grasped the water-carrier's hand, and said, "Bring them all to me! Bring them all to me!"

He got the native of Cantal into the Hôtel-Dieu, where he took the greatest care of him. Bianchon had already observed in his chief a predilection for Auvergnats, and especially for water-carriers; but as Desplein took a sort of pride in his cures at the Hôtel-Dieu, the pupil saw nothing very strange in that.

One day, as he crossed the Place Saint-Sulpice, Bianchon caught sight of his master going into the church at about nine in the morning. Desplein, who at that time never went a step without his cab, was on foot, and slipped in by the door in the Rue du Petit-Lion, as if he were stealing into some house of ill-fame. The house surgeon, naturally possessed by curiosity, knowing his master's opinions, and being himself a rabid follower of Cabanis (*Cabaniste en dyable*, with the *y*, which in Rabelais seems to convey an intensity of deviltry)—Bianchon stole into the church, and was not a little astonished to see the great Desplein, the atheist, who had no mercy on the angels—who give no work to the lancet, and cannot suffer from fistula or gastritis—in short, this audacious scoffer kneeling humbly, and where? In the Lady Chapel, where he remained through the mass, giving alms for the expenses of the service, alms for the poor, and looking as serious as though he were superintending an operation.

"He has certainly not come here to clear up the question of the Virgin's delivery," said Bianchon to himself, astonished beyond measure. "If I had caught him holding one

of the ropes of the canopy on Corpus Christi day, it would be a thing to laugh at ; but at this hour, alone, with no one to see—it is surely a thing to marvel at ! ”

Bianchon did not wish to seem as though he were spying the head surgeon of the Hôtel-Dieu ; he went away. As it happened, Desplein asked him to dine with him that day, not at his own house, but at a restaurant. At dessert Bianchon skilfully contrived to talk of the mass, speaking of it as mummery and a farce.

“ A farce,” said Desplein, “ which has cost Christendom more blood than all Napoleon’s battles and all Broussais’ leeches. The mass is a papal invention, not older than the sixth century, and based on the *Hoc est corpus*. What floods of blood were shed to establish the Fête-Dieu, the Festival of Corpus Christi—the institution by which Rome established her triumph in the question of the Real Presence, a schism which rent the Church during three centuries ! The wars of the Count of Toulouse against the Albigenes were the tail end of that dispute. The Vaudois and the Albigenes refused to recognize this innovation.”

In short, Desplein was delighted to disport himself in his most atheistical vein ; a flow of Voltairian satire, or, to be accurate, a vile imitation of the *Citateur*.

“ Hallo ! where is my worshiper of this morning ? ” said Bianchon to himself.

He said nothing ; he began to doubt whether he had really seen his chief at Saint-Sulpice. Desplein would not have troubled himself to tell Bianchon a lie, they knew each other too well ; they had already exchanged thoughts on quite equally serious subjects, and discussed systems *de natura rerum* (a quotation monger), probing or dissecting them with the knife and scalpel of incredulity.

Three months went by. Bianchon did not attempt to follow the matter up, though it remained stamped on his memory. One day that year, one of the physicians of the

Hôtel-Dieu took Desplein by the arm, as if to question him, in Bianchon's presence.

"What were you doing at Saint-Sulpice, my dear master?" said he.

"I went to see a priest who has a diseased knee-bone, and to whom the Duchesse d'Angoulême did me the honor to recommend me," said Desplein.

The questioner took this defeat for an answer; not so Bianchon.

"Oh, he goes to see damaged knees in church! He went to mass," said the young man to himself.

Bianchon resolved to watch Desplein. He remembered the day and hour when he had detected him going into Saint-Sulpice, and resolved to be there again next year on the same day and at the same hour, to see if he should find him there again. In that case the periodicity of his devotions would justify a scientific investigation; for in such a man there ought to be no direct antagonism of thought and action.

Next year, on the said day and hour, Bianchon, who had already ceased to be Desplein's house surgeon, saw the great man's cab standing at the corner of the Rue du Petit-Lion, whence his friend jesuitically crept along by the wall of Saint-Sulpice, and once more attended mass in front of the Virgin's altar. It was Desplein, sure enough! The master-surgeon, the atheist at heart, the worshiper by chance. The mystery was greater than ever; the regularity of the phenomenon complicated it. When Desplein had left, Bianchon went to the sacristan, who took charge of the chapel, and asked him whether the gentleman was a constant worshiper.

"For twenty years that I have been here," replied the man, "M. Desplein has come four times a year to attend this mass. He founded it."

"A mass founded by him!" said Bianchon, as he went away. "This is as great a mystery as the Immaculate Con-

ception—an article which alone is enough to make a physician an unbeliever.”

Some time elapsed before Doctor Bianchon, though so much his friend, found an opportunity of speaking to Desplein of this incident of his life. Though they met in consultation or in society, it was difficult to find an hour of confidential solitude when, sitting with their feet on the fire-dogs and their heads resting on the back of an armchair, two men tell each other their secrets. At last, seven years later, after the Revolution of 1830, when the mob invaded the Archbishop's residence, when Republican agitators spurred them on to destroy the gilt crosses which flashed like streaks of lightning in the immensity of the ocean of houses; when incredulity flaunted itself in the streets, side by side with rebellion, Bianchon once more detected Desplein going into Saint-Sulpice. The doctor followed him, and knelt down by him without the slightest notice or demonstration of surprise from his friend. They both attended this mass of his founding.

“Will you tell me, my dear fellow,” said Bianchon, as they left the church, “the reason for your fit of monkishness? I have caught you three times going to mass—You! You must account to me for this mystery, explain such a flagrant disagreement between your opinions and your conduct. You do not believe in God, and yet you attend mass. My dear master, you are bound to give me an answer.”

“I am like a great many devout people, men who on the surface are deeply religious, but quite as much atheists as you or I can be.”

And he poured out a torrent of epigrams on certain political personages, of whom the best known gives us, in this century, a new edition of Molière's “Tartufe.”

“All that has nothing to do with my question,” retorted Bianchon. “I want to know the reason for what you have just been doing, and why you founded this mass.”

“Faith! my dear boy,” said Desplein, “I am on the verge

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of the tomb; I may safely tell you about the beginning of my life."

At this moment Bianchon and the great man were in the Rue des Quatre-Vents, one of the worst streets in Paris. Desplein pointed to the sixth floor of one of the houses looking like obelisks, of which the narrow door opens into a passage with a winding staircase at the end, with windows appropriately termed "borrowed lights," or, in French, days of affliction. It was a greenish structure; the ground floor occupied by a furniture dealer, while each floor seemed to shelter a different and independent form of misery. Throwing up his arm with a vehement gesture, Desplein exclaimed—

"I lived up there for two years."

"I know; Arthez lived there; I went up there almost every day during my first youth; we used to call it then the pickle-jar of great men! What then?"

"The mass I have just attended is connected with some events which took place at the time when I lived in the garret where you say Arthez lived: the one with the window where the clothes-line is hanging with linen over a pot of flowers. My early life was so hard, my dear Bianchon, that I may dispute the palm of Paris suffering with any man living. I have endured everything: hunger and thirst, want of money, want of clothes, of shoes, of linen, every cruelty that penury can inflict. I have blown on my frozen fingers in that pickle-jar of great men, which I should like to see again, now, with you. I worked through a whole winter, seeing my head steam, and perceiving the atmosphere of my own moisture as we see that of horses on a frosty day. I do not know where a man finds the fulcrum that enables him to hold out against such a life.

"I was alone, with no one to help me, no money to buy books or to pay the expenses of my medical training; I had not a friend; my irascible, touchy, restless temper was against me. No one understood that this irritability was the distress

and toil of a man who, at the bottom of the social scale, is struggling to reach the surface. Still, I had, as I may say to you, before whom I need wear no draperies, I had that ground-bed of good feeling and keen sensitiveness which must always be the birthright of any man who is strong enough to climb to any height whatever, after having long trampled in the bogs of poverty. I could obtain nothing from my family, nor from my home, beyond my inadequate allowance. In short, at that time, I breakfasted off a roll which the baker in the Rue du Petit-Lion sold me cheap because it was left from yesterday or the day before, and I crumbled it into milk; thus my morning meal cost me but two sous. I dined only every other day in a boarding-house where the meal cost me sixteen sous. You know as well as I what care I must have taken of my clothes and shoes. I hardly know whether in later life we feel grief so deep when a colleague plays us false, as we have known, you and I, on detecting the mocking smile of a gaping seam in a shoe, or hearing the armhole of a coat split. I drank nothing but water; I regarded a café with distant respect. Zoppi's seemed to me a promised land where none but the Lucullus of the *pays Latin* had a right of entry. 'Shall I ever take a cup of coffee there with milk in it?' said I to myself, 'or play a game of dominoes?'

"I threw into my work the fury I felt at my misery. I tried to master positive knowledge so as to acquire the greatest personal value, and merit the position I should hold as soon as I could escape from nothingness. I consumed more oil than bread; the light I burned during these endless nights cost me more than food. It was a long duel, obstinate, with no sort of consolation. I found no sympathy anywhere. To have friends must we not form connections with young men, have a few sous so as to be able to go tippling with them and meet them where students congregate? And I had nothing! And no one in Paris can understand that nothing means *nothing*. When I even thought of revealing my beggary, I had that



nervous contraction of the throat which makes a sick man believe that a ball rises up from the œsophagus into the larynx.

"In later life I have met people born to wealth who, never having wanted for anything, had never even heard this problem in the rule of three: A young man is to crime as a five-franc piece is to  $x$ . These gilded idiots say to me, 'Why did you get into debt? Why did you involve yourself in such onerous obligations?' They remind me of the princess who, on hearing that the people lacked bread, said, 'Why do they not buy cakes?' I should like to see one of these rich men, who complain that I charge too much for an operation, —yes, I should like to see him alone in Paris without a sou, without a friend, without credit, and forced to work with his five fingers to live at all! What would he do? Where would he go to satisfy his hunger?

"Bianchon, if you have sometimes seen me hard and bitter, it was because I was adding my early sufferings on to the insensibility, the selfishness of which I have seen thousands of instances in the highest circles; or, perhaps, I was thinking of the obstacles which hatred, envy, jealousy, and calumny raised up between me and success. In Paris, when certain people see you ready to set your foot in the stirrup, some pull your coat-tails, others loosen the buckle of the strap that you may fall and crack your skull; one wrenches off your horse's shoes, another steals your whip, and the least treacherous of them all is the man whom you see coming to fire his pistol at you point-blank.

"You yourself, my dear boy, are clever enough to make acquaintance before long with the odious and incessant warfare waged by mediocrity against the superior man. If you should drop five and twenty louis one day, you will be accused of gambling on the next, and your best friends will report that you have lost twenty-five thousand. If you have a headache, you will be considered mad. If you are a little hasty, no one can live with you. If, to make a stand against this

armament of pigmies, you collect your best powers, your best friends will cry out that you want to have everything, that you aim at domineering, at tyranny. In short, your good points will become your faults, your faults will be vices, and your virtues crimes.

"If you save a man, you will be said to have killed him; if he reappears on the scene, it will be positive that you have secured the present at the cost of the future. If he is not dead, he will die. Stumble, and you fall! Invent anything of any kind and claim your rights, you will be crotchety, cunning, ill-disposed to rising younger men.

"So, you see, my dear fellow, if I do not believe in God, I believe still less in man. But do you not know in me another Desplein, altogether different from the Desplein whom every one abuses? However, we will not stir that mud-heap.

"Well, I was living in that house, I was working hard to pass my first examination, and I had no money at all. You know. I had come to one of those moments of extremity when a man says, 'I will enlist.' I had one hope. I expected from my home a box full of linen, a present from one of those old aunts who, knowing nothing of Paris, think of your shirts, while they imagine that their nephew with thirty francs a month is eating ortolans. The box arrived while I was at the schools; it had cost forty francs for carriage. The porter, a German shoemaker living in a loft, had paid the money and kept the box. I walked up and down the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain-des-Près and the Rue de l'École de Médecine without hitting on any scheme which would release my trunk without the payment of the forty francs, which of course I could pay as soon as I should have sold the linen. My stupidity proved to me that surgery was my only vocation. My good fellow, refined souls, whose powers move in a lofty atmosphere, have none of that spirit of intrigue that is fertile in resource and device; their good genius is chance; they do not invent, things come to them.

"At night I went home, at the very moment when my fellow-lodger also came in—a water-carrier named Bourgeat, a native of Saint-Flour. We knew each other as two lodgers do who have rooms off the same landing, and who hear each other sleeping, coughing, dressing, and so at last become used to one another. My neighbor informed me that the landlord, to whom I owed three-quarters' rent, had turned me out; I must clear out next morning. He himself was also turned out on account of his occupation. I spent the most miserable night of my life. Where was I to get a messenger who could carry my few chattels and my books? How could I pay him and the porter? Where was I to go? I repeated these unanswerable questions again and again, in tears, as madmen repeat their tunes. I fell asleep; poverty has for its friend heavenly slumbers full of beautiful dreams.

"Next morning, just as I was swallowing my little bowl of bread soaked in milk, Bourgeat came in and said to me in his vile Auvergne accent—

"'Mister Student, I am a very poor man, a foundling from the hospital at Saint-Flour, without either father or mother, and not rich enough to marry. You are not fertile in relations either, nor well supplied with the ready? Listen, I have a hand-cart downstairs which I have hired for two sous an hour; it will hold all our goods; if you like, we will try to find lodgings together, since we are both turned out of this. It is not the earthly paradise, when all is said and done.'

"'I know that, my good Bourgeat,' said I. 'But I am in a great fix. I have a trunk downstairs with a hundred francs' worth of linen in it, out of which I could pay the landlord and all I owe to the porter, and I have not a hundred sous.'

"'Pooh! I have a few dubs,' replied Bourgeat joyfully, and he pulled out a greasy old leather purse. 'Keep your linen.'

"Bourgeat paid up my arrears and his own, and settled with the porter. Then he put our furniture and my box of

linen in his cart, and pulled it along the street, stopping in front of every house where there was a notice board. I went up to see whether the rooms to let would suit us. At mid-day we were still wandering about the neighborhood without having found anything. The price was the great difficulty. Bourgeat proposed that we should eat at a wine-shop, leaving the cart at the door. Towards evening I discovered, in the Cour de Rohan, Passage du Commerce, at the very top of a house next the roof, two rooms with a staircase between them. Each of us was to pay sixty francs a year. So there we were housed, my humble friend and I. We dined together. Bourgeat, who earned about fifty sous a day, had saved a hundred crowns or so; he would soon be able to gratify his ambition by buying a barrel and a horse. On learning my situation—for he extracted my secrets with a quiet craftiness and good-nature, of which the remembrance touches my heart to this day, he gave up for a time the ambition of his whole life; for twenty-two years he had been carrying water in the street, and he now devoted his hundred crowns to my future prospects."

Desplein at these words clutched Bianchon's arm tightly. "He gave me the money for my examination fees! That man, my friend, understood that I had a mission, that the needs of my intellect were greater than his. He looked after me, he called me his boy, he loaned me money to buy books, he would come in softly sometimes to watch me at work, and took a mother's care in seeing that I had wholesome and abundant food, instead of the bad and insufficient nourishment I had been condemned to. Bourgeat, a man of about forty, had a homely, mediæval type of face, a prominent forehead, a head that a painter might have chosen as a model for that of Lycurgus. The poor man's heart was big with affections seeking an object; he had never been loved but by a poodle that had died some time since, of which he would talk to me, asking whether I thought the Church would allow

masses to be said for the repose of its soul. His dog, said he, had been a good Christian, who for twelve years had accompanied him to church, never barking, listening to the organ without opening his mouth, and crouching beside him in a way that made it seem as though he were praying too.

“This man centred all his affections in me; he looked upon me as a forlorn and suffering creature, and he became, to me, the most thoughtful mother, the most considerate benefactor, the ideal of the virtue which rejoices in its own work. When I met him in the street, he would throw me a glance of intelligence full of unutterable dignity; he would affect to walk as though he carried no weight, and seemed happy in seeing me in good health and well dressed. It was, in fact, the devoted affection of the lower classes, the love of a girl of the people transferred to a loftier level. Bourgeat did all my errands, woke me at night at any fixed hour, trimmed my lamp, cleaned our landing; as good as a servant as he was as a father, and as clean as an English girl. He did all the housework. Like Philopœmen, he sawed our wood, and gave to all he did the grace of simplicity while preserving his dignity, for he seemed to understand that the end ennobles every act.

“When I left this good fellow, to be house surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, I felt an indescribable, dull pain, knowing that he could no longer live with me; but he comforted himself with the prospect of saving up money enough for me to take my degree, and he made me promise to go to see him whenever I had a day out: Bourgeat was proud of me. He loved me for my own sake, and for his own. If you look up my thesis, you will see that I dedicated it to him.

“During the last year of my residence as house surgeon I earned enough to repay all I owed to this worthy Auvergnat by buying him a barrel and a horse. He was furious with rage at learning that I had been depriving myself of spending my money, and yet he was delighted so see his wishes ful-

filled ; he laughed and scolded, he looked at his barrel, at his horse, and wiped away a tear, as he said, 'It is too bad. What a splendid barrel ! You really ought not. Why, that horse is as strong as an Auvergnat !'

"I never saw a more touching scene. Bourgeat insisted on buying for me the case of instruments mounted in silver which you have seen in my room, and which is to me the most precious thing there. Though enchanted with my first success, never did the least sign, the least word, escape him which might imply, 'This man owes all to me !' And yet, but for him, I should have died of want.

"He fell ill. As you may suppose, I passed my nights by his bedside, and the first time I pulled him through ; but two years after he had a relapse ; in spite of the utmost care, in spite of the greatest exertions of science, he succumbed. No king was ever nursed as he was. Yes, Bianchon, to snatch that man from death I tried unheard-of things. I wanted him to live long enough to show him his work accomplished, to realize all his hopes, to give expression to the only need for gratitude that ever filled my heart, to quench a fire that burns in me to this day.

"Bourgeat, my second father, died in my arms," Desplein went on, after a pause, visibly moved. "He left me everything he possessed by a will he had had made by a public scrivener, dating from the year when we had gone to live in the Cour de Rohan.

"This man's faith was perfect ; he loved the Holy Virgin as he might have loved his wife. He was an ardent Catholic, but never said a word to me about my want of religion. When he was dying he entreated me to spare no expense that he might have every possible benefit of the clergy. I had a mass said for him every day. Often, in the night, he would tell me of his fears as to his future fate ; he feared his life had not been saintly enough. Poor man ! he was at work from morning till night. For whom, then, is paradise—if there be a

paradise? He received the last sacrament like the saint that he was, and his death was worthy of his life.

"I alone followed him to the grave. When I had laid my only benefactor to rest, I looked about to see how I could pay my debt to him; I found he had neither family nor friends, neither wife nor child. But he believed. He had a religious conviction; had I any right to dispute it? He had spoken to me timidly of masses said for the repose of the dead; he would not impress it on me as a duty, thinking that it would be a form of repayment for his services. As soon as I had money enough I paid to Saint-Sulpice the requisite sum for four masses every year. As the only thing I can do for Bourgeat is thus to satisfy his pious wishes, on the days when that mass is said, at the beginning of each season of the year, I go for his sake and say the required prayers; and I say with the good faith of a sceptic—'Great God, if there is a sphere which Thou hast appointed after death for those who have been perfect, remember good Bourgeat; and if he should have anything to suffer, let me suffer it for him, that he may enter all the sooner into what is called paradise.'

"That, my dear fellow, is as much as a man who holds my opinions can allow himself. But God must be a good fellow; He cannot owe me any grudge. I swear to you, I would give my whole fortune if faith such as Bourgeat's could enter my brain."

Bianchon, who was with Desplein all through his last illness, dares not affirm to this day that the great surgeon died an atheist. Will not those who believe like to fancy that the humble Auvergnat came to open the gate of heaven to his friend, as he did that of the earthly temple on whose pediment we read the words—"A grateful country to its great men."

\* PARIS, *January, 1836.*

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE  
THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE  
CHRIST IN FLANDERS  
MELMOTH RECONCILED  
THE RED HOUSE





## PREFACE.

THE volume of the old edition of the "Comédie Humaine," which opened with "The Quest of the Absolute," together with that generally entitled "The Maranas," contains the cream and flower of Balzac as a story-teller; and the first excels the second in showing the fiery heat and glow of the author's imagination. Its principal constituent, the title story, is large enough for a novel by itself. The chief of the minor elements, "The Unknown Masterpiece," has seemed to some the actual masterpiece of the author. "Jésus-Christ en Flandre," like some others of Balzac's short stories, intimates an intention in him of emulating the *contes fantastiques*, half-humorous and half-romantic, half-Voltairian and half-mystical, which were so much in favor in 1830. It is, I think, quite the best of them, and it shows its author's great manner in more points than one. But just as at the end of "L'Elixir de longue Vie" we want the touch of Hoffmann rather than that of Balzac; so here we find something that is not quite perfect, that wants another hand. Even as it is, we would not change for anything else, but we have the sense that the same thing by another person might have been even better. "Melmoth réconcilié," an inferior thing in itself, has in the same way a sort of special and adventitious interest.

I do not know that I admire "The Red House" quite so much as some of the other contents of the volume. It has interest; and it may be observed that, as indicating the origin of Taillefer's wealth, it connects itself with the general scheme of the "Comédie," as few of the others do. But it is an at-

(ix)

tempt, like one or two others of Balzac's, at a style very popular in 1830, a sort of combination of humor and terror, of Sterne and Monk Lewis, which is a little doubtful in itself, which has very rarely been done well, and for which he himself was not quite completely equipped.

But "The Quest of the Absolute" is, as has been said, a novel in itself. Taking minor points only, it is a masterpiece. That there is a certain parallelism, probably unconscious, between the way in which Balthazar Claes as unconsciously kills his wife and the way in which Monsieur Grandet kills his, is certainly no drawback to the book; for the repetition, if it is a repetition, only shows how genius can repeat. Indeed, there is the same demonstration contained in the same books in the representation of the diverse martyrdoms of Madame Claes and her daughter Marguerite, fatal in the former case, happily changed in the latter. In no book is Balzac's faculty of Dutch drawing, as far as scenes and details go, more brilliantly shown; in none are the minor characters—from the *famulus* Le Mulquinier, with his fatal belief in his master's madness, downwards—better; while Marguerite Claes and her mother, especially Marguerite, are by common consent to be ranked among Balzac's greatest triumphs in portraying "honest women."

But these things, though they illustrate the general principle that the presence of a great central interest and figure will radiate greatness and interest on its surroundings, would contribute comparatively little to the effect of the book if it were not for the seeker after the absolute himself. Nowhere, perhaps, has the hopeless tyranny of the fixed idea, the ferocious (not exactly selfish) absorption in the pursuit of a craze, been portrayed with quite the same power as here. And we know and feel that the energy, the fire, the perfection of the handling are due to sympathy—that Balzac a few generations earlier would have sought the Philosopher's Stone with the same desperate energy as Balthazar. Probably nothing but his prior

attachment to literary work prevented him from doing something similar; while actually, as it was, he kept himself in lifelong difficulties by no very different persistence in the corresponding, if more ignoble, game of speculation.

I have just said that the tyranny of the ideal has nowhere been more successfully portrayed than in "The Quest of the Absolute;" but there is perhaps one exception, and it is "The Unknown Masterpiece," which should be carefully compared with the larger fiction. The attraction of this wonderful and terrible piece for all who have anything to do with the things of the spirit, whether in the way of criticism or in the way of creation, can hardly be exaggerated. I remember many years ago spending half an evening in discussing, in a sort of amœbean strain, its merits with the late Mr. Stevenson; and everybody knows the compliment which a distinguished American writer has paid it by attempting a sort of paraphrase of its original. The same interest is present here and in "The Quest," but it is a little complicated, a little refined upon. Here, too, there is the sorcery of the ideal, the frenzied passion for attainment and perfection. But here there is a special *nuance* almost as closely connected with Balzac's individuality as the general scheme. We know that the mania of constant retouching, of adding strokes, was a danger of his own; that he did actually indulge in it to an extent very prejudicial to his pecuniary interest, and perhaps not always advantageous to the effect of his work, though the artist in words is hardly exposed to any such absolutely hopeless catastrophe in such a case as is the artist in line and color.

Yet, wonderful as this is, it cannot in its limited space, and with its intensely concentrated interest, vie with the amplitude, the variety, the dignity of "The Quest." Balzac might have made this too long: he was not always proof against that temptation. But in it, as in "Eugénie Grandet," with which it has been already compared, he has hit the exact mean be-

tween a short tale and a long novel, has not sinned by digression and episode, has hardly sinned by undue indulgence in detail. The interest is perhaps remoter from the general human understanding than that of "Eugénie" and one or two others. But it is handled with equal mastery, and the effect is at least equally good.

It is not, of course, that a knowledge of Balzac's own peculiarities adds anything to the sense of the artistic eminence of these two stories. That would be clear if we knew nothing whatever about the other part of the matter. But it cannot be regarded as uninteresting that we should thus know the secret of the *furia*, the "nobler gust" of sympathy and enjoyment with which the writer, consciously or unconsciously, must have set about these two great and, in his own work, almost incomparable things.

"The Quest of the Absolute" appeared in 1834, with seven chapter-divisions, as a "Scène de la vie privée;" was published by itself in 1839 by Charpentier; and took its final place as a part of the "Comédie" in 1845.

G. S.



## THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE.

*To Madame Josephine Delannoy, née Doumerc.*

*Madame, may God grant that this, my book, may live longer than I, for then the gratitude which I owe to you, and which I hope will equal your almost maternal kindness to me, would last beyond the limits prescribed for human affection. This sublime privilege of prolonging the life in our hearts for a time by the life of the work we leave behind us would be (if we could only be sure of gaining it at last) a reward indeed for all the labor undertaken by those who aspire to such an immortality. Yet again I say—May God grant it!*

*De Balsac.*

THERE is in Douai, in the Rue de Paris, a house that may be singled out from all others in the city; for in every respect, in its outward appearance, in its interior arrangements, and in every detail, it is a perfect example of an old Flemish building, and preserves all the characteristics of a quaint style of domestic architecture thoroughly in keeping with the patriarchal manners of the good folk in the Low Countries. But before proceeding to describe the house, it may not be wholly unnecessary here to enter, on behalf of authors, a protest in favor of those didactic preliminaries for which the ignorant and impatient reader has so strong a dislike. There are persons who crave sensations, yet have not patience to submit to the influences which produce them; who would fain have flowers without the seed, the child without gestation. Art, it would seem, is to accomplish what nature cannot.

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It so happens that human life in all its aspects, wide or narrow, is so intimately connected with architecture, that with a certain amount of observation we can usually reconstruct a bygone society from the remains of its public monuments. From relics of household stuff, we can imagine its owners "in their habit as they lived." Archæology, in fact, is to the body social somewhat as comparative anatomy is to animal organizations. A complete social system is made clear to us by a bit of mosaic, just as a whole past order of things is implied by the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus. Beholding the cause, we guess the effect, even as we proceed from the effect to the cause, one deduction following another until a chain of evidence is complete, until the man of science raises up a whole bygone world from the dead, and discovers for us not only the features of the past, but even the warts upon those features.

Hence, no doubt, the prodigious interest which people take in descriptions of architecture so long as the writer keeps his own idiosyncrasies out of the text and does not obscure the facts with theories of his own; for every one, by a simple process of deduction, can call up the past for himself as he reads. Human experience varies so little that the past seems strangely like the present; and when we learn what has been, it not seldom happens that we also behold plainly what shall be again. As a matter of fact, we can seldom see a picture or a description of any place wherein the current of human life has once flowed without being put in mind of our own personal experience, our broken resolutions, or our blossoming hopes; and the contrast between the present, in which our heart's desire is never given to us, and the future, when our wishes may be fulfilled, is an inexhaustible source of melancholy or delightful musings. How is it that Flemish art, with its pictures of Flemish life, makes an almost irresistible appeal to our feelings whenever the little details are faithfully rendered? Perhaps the secret of the charm lies in

this—that there seems less uncertainty and perplexity in this matter-of-fact life than in any other. Such art could hardly exist without the opulent comfort which comes of a prosperity of long use and wont ; it depicts an existence peaceful to the verge of beatitude, with all its complicated family ties and domestic festivals ; but it is no less the expression of a tranquillity wellnigh monotonous, of a prosperity which frankly finds its happiness in self-indulgence, which has nothing left to wish for, because its every desire is gratified as soon as it is formed. Even passionate temperaments, that measure the force of life by the tumult of the soul, cannot see these placid pictures and feel unmoved ; it is only shallow people who think that because the pulse beats so steadily the heart is cold.

The energy that expends itself in a sudden and violent outbreak produces a far greater effect on the popular imagination than an equal force exerted slowly and persistently. The crowds have neither the time nor the patience to estimate an enormous power which is uniformly exerted ; they do not reflect on appearances ; they are borne too swiftly along the current of life ; it is therefore only transcendent passion that makes any impression upon them, and the great artist is most extolled when he exceeds the limits of perfection : Michel Angelo, Bianca Cappello, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Beethoven, Paganini—you may pass their names in review. It is only a rare and great power which knows that there must be no overstepping of the limit line, that sets in the first place that quality of symmetry, that completeness which stamps a perfect work of art with the profound repose which has so strong a charm for those who are capable of recognizing it. But the life adopted by this practical people is in all respects the ideal life of the citizen as conceived of by the lower classes ; it is a bourgeois paradise in which nothing is lacking to fill the measure of their felicity.

A highly refined materialism is the distinguishing characteristic of Flemish life. There is something dull, dreary, and



unimaginative about English "comfort;" but a Flemish interior with its glowing colors is a delight to the eyes, and there is a blithe simplicity about the homeliness of Flemish life; evidently the burden of toil is not too heavily felt, and the tobacco-pipe shows that the Flemings have applied the Neapolitan doctrine of *far niente* (doing nothing), while a tranquil appreciation of art and beauty in their surroundings is no less evident. In the temper of the people, indeed, there are two of the most essential conditions for the cultivation of art: patience, and that capacity for taking pains which is necessary if the work of the artist is to live; these are pre-eminently the characteristics of the patient and painstaking Fleming. The magical splendor, the subtle beauty of poetry, are attainments impossible for patience and conscientiousness, you think? Their life in Flanders must be as monotonously level as the lowlands of Holland, and as dreary as their clouded skies! But it is nothing of the kind. The power of civilization has been brought to bear in every direction—even the effects of the climate have been modified.

If you notice the differences between the products of various parts of the globe, it surprises you at first that the prevailing tints of the temperate zones should be grays and tawny-browns, while the brilliant colors are confined to tropical regions—a natural law which applies no less to habits of life. But Flanders, with her naturally brown and sober hues, has learned how to brighten the naturally foggy and sullen atmosphere in the course of many a political revolution. From her old lords, the Dukes of Burgundy, she passed to the Kings of Spain and France; she has been forced to seek allies in Holland and in Germany, and Flemish life bears witness to all these changes. There are traces of Spanish dominion in their lavish use of scarlet, of lustrous satins, in the bold designs of their tapestry, in their drooping feathers and mandolins, in their stately and ceremonious customs. From Venice, in exchange for their linen and laces, they received

the glasses of fantastic form in which the wine seems to glow with a richer color. From Austria they received the tradition of the grave and deliberate diplomacy which, to quote the popular adage, "made three steps in a bushel basket."

Their trade with the Indies has brought them in abundance the grotesque inventions of China and the marvels of Japan. But with all their receptiveness, their power of absorbing everything, of giving out nothing, and of patiently enduring any yoke, Flanders could hardly be regarded as anything but an European curiosity shop, a mere confusion of nationalities, until the discovery of tobacco inaugurated a new era. Then the national character was fused and formed out of all these scattered elements, and the features of the first Fleming looked forth at last upon the world through a cloud of tobacco-smoke. Ever since that time—no matter for their frontiers and their lands divided piecemeal—there is no question of the solidarity of the Flemings; they are one nation, thanks to the tankard and the tobacco-pipe.

So Flanders, with its practical turn, has constantly assimilated the intellectual and material wealth of its masters and neighbors, until the country, originally so dreary and unromantic, has recast its life on a model of its own choosing, acquiring the habits and manners best suited to the Flemish temperament without apparently losing its own individuality or independence. The art of Flanders, for instance, did not strive after ideal forms; it was content to reproduce the real as it had never been reproduced before. It is useless to ask this country of monumental poetry for the verve of comedy, for dramatic action, for musical genius, for the bolder flights of the epic or the ode; its bent is rather for experimental science, for lengthy disputations, for work that demands time, and smells somewhat of the lamp. All their researches are of a practical kind, and must conduce to physical well-being. They look at facts and see nothing beyond them; thought must bear the yoke and be subservient to the needs of life; it

must occupy itself with realities, and never soar above or beyond them. Their sole conception of a national career was a sort of political thrift, their force in insurrection was the outcome of an energetic desire to have sufficient elbow-room at table and to take their ease beneath the eaves of their *steedes*.

It was this love of comfort, together with the independent attitude of mind which is a result of prosperity, that led them first to feel that desire for liberty which, later on, was to set all Europe in a ferment. Moreover, there is a dogged tenacity about a Fleming and a fixity of idea which makes him grow dangerous in the defence of his rights. They are a thorough people ; and whether it is a question of architecture or furniture, of dykes or agriculture or insurrection, they never do things by halves. No one can approach them in anything they set themselves to do. The manufacture of lace, involving the patient cultivation of flax and the still more patient labor of the worker, together with the industry of the linen weaver, have been the sources of their wealth from one generation to another.

If you wished to paint stability incarnate, perhaps you could not do better than take some good burgomaster of the Low Countries for model ; a man not lacking in heroism, and, as has often been seen, ready to die in his citizen fashion an obscure death for the rights of his *Hausa*.

But the grace and poetry of this patriarchal existence is naturally revealed in a description of one of the last remaining houses, which at the time when this story begins still preserved the traditions and the characteristics of that life in Douai.

Of all places in the department of the Nord, Douai (alas !) is the town which is being modernized most rapidly ; modern innovations are bringing about a revolution there. Old buildings are disappearing day by day, old-world ways are almost forgotten in the widespread zeal for social progress.

Douai now takes its tone, its ways of life, and its fashions from Paris; in Douai there will soon be little left of the old Flemish tradition save its assiduous and cordial hospitality, together with the courtesy of Spain, the opulence and cleanliness of Holland. The old brick-built houses are being replaced by hôtels with white-stone facings. Substantial Batavian comfort is disappearing to make way for elegant frivolity imported from France.

The house in which the events took place, which are to be described in the course of this story, was almost half-way down the Rue de Paris, and has borne in Douai, for more than two hundred years, the name of the "Maison Claes."

The Van Claes had formerly been among the most celebrated of the families of craftsmen who founded the commercial prosperity of the Netherlands. For many generations Claes succeeded Claes as the Dean of the great and powerful Guild of Weavers in Ghent. When Charles V. endeavored to deprive the city of its privileges and Ghent rose in revolt, the wealthiest of the Claes found himself so deeply compromised that, foreseeing the inevitable end and the fate reserved for him and his companions, he sent away his wife and children and valuables under a French escort, before the city was invested by the Imperial troops. Events proved that the fears of the Dean of the Guild were but too well founded. When the city capitulated, he and some few fellow-citizens were excepted by name from the general amnesty, and the defender of the rights and privileges of Ghent was hanged as a rebel against the Empire. The death of Claes and his companions bore its fruits; in the years to come these useless cruelties were to cost the King of Spain the best part of the Netherlands. Of all seed sown on earth, the blood of the martyrs is the surest, and the harvest follows soonest upon the sowing.

While Philip II. visited the sins of revolted Ghent upon its children's children, and ruled Douai with a rod of iron, the Claes (whose vast fortunes were unimpaired) connected them-

selves by marriage with the elder branch of the noble house of Molina, an alliance which repaired the fortunes of that illustrious family, and enabled them to purchase back their estates; and the broad lands of Nourho, in the kingdom of Leon, came to support an empty title. After this, the course of the family fortunes was sufficiently uneventful until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the family of Claes, or rather the Douai branch of it, was represented in the person of M. Balthazar Claes-Molina, Count of Nourho, who preferred to style himself simply Balthazar Claes. Of all the vast wealth accumulated by his ancestors who had kept so many looms at work, and set in motion so many wheels of commerce, there remained to Balthazar an income of about fifteen thousand livres, derived from landed property in and around Douai, the house in the Rue de Paris, and its furniture, which was worth a little fortune. As for the estates in Leon, they had caused a lawsuit between Molina of Flanders and Molina of Spain. The Molinas of Leon gained the day, and assumed the title of Counts of Nourho, although in truth it belonged to the elder branch, the Flemish Claes; but bourgeois vanity in the Belgian house rose superior to Castilian pride.

When, therefore, formal designations were registered, Balthazar Claes put off the rags of Spanish nobility to shine with all the lustre of his descent from citizens of Ghent. The instinct of patriotism was so strong in the exiled families that until the very end of the eighteenth century the Claes remained faithful to family traditions, manners, and customs. They only married into the most strictly bourgeois families, requiring a certain number of aldermen, burgomasters, or the like civic dignitaries among the ancestors of the bride-elect before receiving her among them. Now and then a Claes would seek a wife in Bruges or Ghent, or as far away as Liège, or even in Holland, that so the old domestic traditions might be kept up. Their circle became gradually more and more

restricted, until towards the end of the last century it was limited to some seven or eight families of municipal nobility, wearers of heavy-hanging, toga-like cloaks, who combined the dignified gravity of the magistrate with that of the Spanish grandee, and whose manner of life and habits were in harmony with their appearance. The family of Claes was looked on by the rest of the citizens with a kind of awe that was almost superstitious. The unswerving loyalty, the spotless integrity of the Claes, together with their staid, impressive demeanor under all circumstances, had given rise to a sort of legend of the Claes, and the "Maison Claes" was as much an institution in the city as the Fête de Gayant. The spirit of old Flanders seemed to fill the old house in the Rue de Paris, in which lovers of municipal antiquity would find a perfect example of the unpretending houses which the wealthy burghers of the Middle Ages built for themselves to dwell in.

The principal adornment of the house front was the great doorway with its folding leaves of oak, studded with large nails, arranged in groups of five; in the centre the Claes had proudly carved their arms, two spindles conjoined. The pointed archway was of sandstone, and was surmounted by a little statuette of St. Genevieve with her spindle, set in a sort of shrine with a cross above it. The delicate carving about the shrine and the doorway had grown somewhat darker by the lapse of time; but so carefully had it been kept by the owners of the house, that every detail was visible at a passing glance. The clustered shafts in the jams on either side the doorway had preserved their dark gray color, and shone as if their surfaces had been polished. The windows were all alike. The sill was supported by a richly-carved bracket, the window frame was of white stone and in the form of a cross, so that the window itself was divided into four unequal parts, the two lower lights being nearly twice the size of the upper. Each of the upper divisions was surmounted by an arch, which sprang from the height of the central mullion. These

arches consisted of a triple row of bricks, each row jutting out above the one beneath it by way of ornament ; the bricks in each row, moreover, alternately projected and receded about an inch, so as to form a sort of checquer pattern. The small lozenge-shaped panes were set in exceedingly slender reticulating bars, which were painted red.

For the sake of added strength a course of white stone was built at intervals into the brick walls, which were jointed with white mortar, and the corners of the house were constructed of white stone quoins.

There were two windows on the ground floor, one on either side of the door, five in the first story, and but three in the second, while the third immediately beneath the roof was lighted by a single circular window, divided into five compartments, and faced with sandstone. This window was set in the centre of the gable like a rose window over the arched gateway of a cathedral.

The weathercock on the ridge of the roof was a spindle filled with flax. The two sides of the great gable rose step-wise from the height of the first story, and at this departing point a grotesque gargoyle on either side discharged the rain-water from the gutters. All around the base of the house there ran a projecting course of sandstone like a step. Finally, on either side, between the window and the door lay a trap-door, heavily bound and hinged with iron scroll-work, a relic of the days of yore.

Ever since the house had been built the front had been carefully scoured twice a year ; not a particle of mortar came loose or fell out but was immediately replaced. The costliest marbles in Paris are not kept so clean and so free from dust as the window-bars, sills, and outside stonework of this Flemish dwelling. The whole house front was in perfect preservation. The color of the surface of the brick might be somewhat darkened by time, but it was as carefully kept as an old picture or some book-lover's cherished folio—treasures

that would never grow old were it not for the noxious gases distilled by our atmosphere, which no less threaten the lives of their owners. The clouded skies of Flanders, the dampness of the climate, the absence of light or air caused by the somewhat narrow street, soon dimmed the glories of this periodically renewed cleanliness, and, moreover, gave the house a dreary and depressing look. A poet would have welcomed a few blades of grass in the openwork of the little shrine, and some mosses on the surface of the sandstone; he might have wished for a cleft or crack here and there in those too orderly rows of bricks, so that a swallow might find a place in which to build her nest beneath the red triple arches of the windows.

There was an excessive neatness and smoothness about the house front, worn with repeated scourings; an air of sedate propriety and of grim respectability which would have driven a romantic writer out of the opposite house if he had been so ill advised as to take up his abode there. This air of propriety and respectability was simply fatal to the spirit of romance.

When a visitor had pulled the wrought-iron bell handle that hung by the side of the door, and a maidservant from some inner region had opened the heavy folding-doors, they fell to again with a clang that echoed up into the lofty roof of a great paved gallery, and died away in remote murmurs through the house. You would have thought that the doors had been made of bronze. From the gallery, which was always cool, with its walls painted to resemble marble, and its paved floor strewn with fine sand, you entered a large square inner court paved with glazed tiles of a greenish color. To the left lay the kitchens, laundry, and servants' hall; to the right the wood-house, the coal-cellars, and various offices. Every window and door was ornamented with carving, which was kept exquisitely spotless and free from dust. The whole place was shut in by four red walls striped with bars of white stone, so that the daylight which penetrated into it seemed in



its passage to take a faint red tint, which was reflected by every figure, and gave a mysterious charm and strange unfamiliar look to every least detail.

On the further side of this courtyard stood that portion of the house in which the family lived, the rear apartment, as they call it in Flanders, a building exactly similar to the one facing the street. The first room on the ground floor was a parlor lighted by four windows; two looked out upon the courtyard, and two upon a garden, a space of ground about as large as that on which the house was built. Access to this garden and to the courtyard was given by two opposite glass doors, which occupied the same relative position as the street door; so that as soon as a stranger entered the whole house lay before him, as well as a distant vista of the greenery at the further end of the garden beyond it.

Visitors were received in that portion of the house which looked out upon the street, and strangers were lodged in apartments in the second story; but though these rooms contained works of art and costly furniture, there was nothing which, in the eyes of Claes himself, could be compared with the art treasures that filled the rooms which had been the centre of family life for centuries, and a discerning taste would have confirmed his judgment. The historian should not omit to record of the Claes who died for the cause of freedom in Ghent, that he had accumulated nearly forty thousand silver marks, gained by the manufacture of sail-cloths for the all-powerful navy of Venice. The Flemish craftsman was a man of substance, and had for his friend the celebrated wood-carver, Van Huysium, of Bruges. Many times the artist had had recourse to his friend's purse. When Ghent rose in revolt, Van Huysium, then himself a wealthy man, had secretly carved for his old friend a piece of paneling of massive ebony, on which he had wrought the story of Van Artevelde, the brewer who for a little while ruled over Flanders. This piece of woodwork consisted of sixty panels, and contained about

fourteen hundred figures; it was considered to be Van Huysium's masterpiece.

When Charles V. made up his mind to celebrate his entry into the city which gave him birth by hanging twenty-six of its burghers, the victims were consigned to the custody of a captain, who (so it was said) had offered to connive at Claes' escape in return for these panels of Van Huysium's, but the weaver had previously sent them into France.

The parlor in the house in the Rue de Paris was wainscoted entirely with these panels. Van Huysium, out of respect for the memory of the martyr, had come himself to set them in their wooden framework, painted with ultramarine, and covered with a gilded network, so that this is the most complete example of a master whose least fragments are now worth their weight in gold. Titian's portrait of Claes in the robes that he wore as President of the Tribunal des Parchons looked down from the chimney-piece; he still seemed to be the head of the family which regarded him with veneration as its great man. The chimney-piece, itself originally plain stone, had been reconstructed of white marble during the eighteenth century. A venerable timepiece stood upon the ledge between two five-branched candle-sconces, tortuous, elaborate, and in the worst possible taste, but all of massive silver. The four windows were draped with crimson brocaded damask curtains, covered with a dark flowered pattern, and lined with white silk; the furniture had been re-covered with the same material in the time of Louis XIV. The polished floor was evidently modern—large squares of white wood, with slips of oak inserted between them, but the ceiling yet preserved the peculiarly deep hues of Dutch oak. Perhaps it had been respected because Van Huysium had carved the masks on the medallions bordered with scrolls which adorned it.

In each of the four corners of the parlor stood a short column, with a five-branched silver sconce upon it, like those upon the chimney-piece, and a round table occupied the

centre of the room. Several card tables were ranged along the walls with much precision ; and on the white marble slabs of two gilded console tables stood, at the time when this story begins, two glass globes full of water, in which gold and silver fish were swimming above a bed of sand and shells.

The room was sombre, and yet aglow with color. The ceiling of dark oak seemed to absorb the light, and to give none of it back into the room. If the sunlight pouring in from the windows that looked out into the garden scintillated from every polished ebony figure on the opposite wall, the light admitted from the courtyard was always so faint that even the gold network on the other side looked dim in the perpetual twilight.

A bright day brought out all the glories of the place ; but, for the most part, its hues were subdued and soft, and, like the sombre browns and reds of autumn forests, they took brighter hues only in the sun. It is unnecessary to describe the "Maison Claes" at further length. Many of the scenes in the course of this story will, of course, take place in other parts of the house, but it will be sufficient for the present to have some idea of its general arrangement.

On a Sunday afternoon towards the end of August, in the year 1812, a woman was sitting in a large easy-chair by one of the windows that looked out on the garden. It was after the time of vespers. The rays of sunlight falling on the side of the house slanted across the room in broad beams, played with fantastic effect on the opposite wall, and died away among the sombre ebony figures of the panels ; but the woman sat in the purple shadow cast by the damask curtain. A painter of mediocre ability could not have failed to make a striking picture if he had faithfully portrayed a face with so sad and wistful an expression. The woman was sitting with her feet stretched out before her in a listless attitude ; apparently she had lost all consciousness of her physical existence, and one all-absorbing thought had complete possession of her

mind, a thought which seemed to open up the paths of the future just as a ray of sunlight piercing through the clouds lights up a gleaming path on the horizon of the sea. Her hands hung over the arms of the chair; her head, as though it bore a load of thought too heavy, had fallen back against the cushions. She wore a loose cambric gown, very simply made; the scarf about her shoulders was carelessly knotted on her breast, so that the lines of her figure were almost concealed. Apparently she preferred to call attention to her face rather than to her person; and it was a face which, even if it had not been brought into strong relief by the light, would have arrested and fixed the attention of any beholder, for its expression of dull, hopeless misery would have struck the most heedless child. Nothing is more terrible to witness than such anguish as this in one who seldom gives way to it; the burning tears that fell from time to time seemed like the fiery lava flood of a volcano. So might a dying mother weep who is compelled to leave her children in the lowest depths of wretchedness without a single human protector.

The lady seemed to be about forty years of age. She was more nearly beautiful now than she had ever been in her girlhood. Clearly she was no daughter of the land. Her hair was thick and black, and fell in curls over her shoulders and about her face; her forehead was very prominent, narrow at the temples, sallow in hue, but the black eyes flashed fire from beneath her brows, and she had the dark pallor of the typical Spaniard. The perfect oval of her face attracted a second glance; the ravages of smallpox had destroyed the delicacy of its outlines, but had not marred its graciousness and dignity; at times it seemed as if the soul had power to restore to it all its pristine purity of form. If pride of birth was revealed in the thick tightly-folded lips, there was also natural kindness and graciousness in their expression; but the feature which gave most distinction to a masculine type of face was an aquiline nose. Its curve was somewhat too strongly marked, the result,

apparently, of some interior defect ; but there was a subtle refinement in its outlines, in the thin septum and fine transparent nostrils that glowed in the light with a bright red. She was a woman who might, or might not, be considered beautiful, but no one could fail to notice the vigorous yet feminine head.

She was short, lame, and deformed ; she had married later than women usually do, and this partly because it was insisted that her slow-wittedness was stupidity ; yet more than one man had read the indications of ardent passion and of inexhaustible tenderness in her face, and had fallen completely under the spell of a charm that was difficult to reconcile with so many defects. She bore in many ways a strong resemblance to the Spanish grandee, her ancestor, the Duke of Casa-Real. Perhaps the force of the charm which romantic natures had erewhile found so tyrannous, the power of a fascination that sways men's hearts, but is powerless to rule their destinies, had never in her life been greater than now, when it was wasted, so to speak, on empty space. She seemed to be watching the gold fish in the glass before her, but in truth her eyes saw nothing, and she raised them from time to time, as if imploring heaven in despair ; it would seem that such trouble as hers could be confided to God alone.

The room was perfectly silent save for the chirping of the crickets without ; the shrill notes of a few cicadas came in with a breath of hot air from the little garden, which was like a furnace in the afternoon sun. From a neighboring room there came smothered sounds ; silver or china rattled, or chairs were moved, as the servants laid the cloth for dinner.

Suddenly the lady started and seemed to listen ; she took her handkerchief, dried her eyes, and endeavored to smile ; so successfully did she efface all traces of sorrow, that from her seeming serenity it might have been thought that she had never known an anxiety or a care in her life. It was the sound of a man's footstep that had wrought the change. It

ecnoed in the long gallery built over the kitchens and the servants' quarters, which united the front part of the house with the back portion in which the family lived. Whether it was because weak health had so long confined her to the house that she could recognize the least noise in it at once; or because a highly-wrought temperament ever on the watch can detect sounds that are imperceptible to ordinary ears; or because nature, in compensation for so many physical disadvantages, had bestowed a gift of sense-perception seldom accorded to human beings apparently more happily constituted; this sense of hearing was abnormally acute in her. The sound of the footsteps came nearer and nearer. And soon, not only for an impassioned soul such as hers, which can annihilate time and space at will that so it may find its other self, but for any stranger, a man's step on the staircase which led to the parlor was audible enough.

There was something in the sound of that footstep which would have struck the most careless mortal; it was impossible to hear it with indifference. We are excited by the mere sounds of hurry or flight; when a man springs up and raises the alarm of "Fire!" his feet are at least as eloquent as his tongue, and the impression left by a slow, measured tread is every whit as powerful. The deliberate, heavy, lagging foot-fall in the gallery would no doubt have irritated impatient people; but a nervous person, or an observer of human nature, could scarcely have heard it without feeling a thrill of something very like dread. Was there any life in those feet that moved so mechanically? It was a dull, heavy sound, as if the floor boards had been struck by an iron weight. The slow, uncertain step called up visions of a man bending under a load of years, or of a thinker walking majestically beneath the weight of worlds. The man reached the lowest stair, and set foot upon the pavement slowly and irresolutely. In the great hall he paused for a moment. A passage led thence to the servants' quarters, a door concealed in the wainscot

gave admittance to the parlor, and through a second parallel door you entered the dining-room.

A light tremor, caused by a sensation like an electric shock, ran through the frame of the woman in the easy-chair; but a sweet smile trembled on her lips, her face lighted up with eager expectation, and grew fair and radiant like the face of an Italian Madonna. She summoned all her strength, and forced back her terrors into some inner depth; then she turned and looked towards the door set in the panels in the corner of the parlor; it flew open so suddenly that the startling sound was quite sufficient to account for and to cover her agitation.

Balthazar Claes appeared and made several paces forward; he either did not look at the woman in the low chair, or if he looked at her, it was with unseeing eyes. He stood upright in the middle of the parlor, his head slightly bent, and supported by his right hand. The smile faded from the woman's face; her heart was pierced by a horrible pang, felt none the less keenly because it had come to be a part of her daily experience; her dark brows contracted with pain, deepening lines already traced there by the frequent expression of strong feeling; and her eyes filled with tears, which she hastily brushed away, as she looked at Balthazar.

There was something exceedingly impressive about the head of the house of Claes. In his younger days he had borne a strong resemblance to the heroic martyr who had threatened to play the part of Artevelde and defied the Emperor, Charles V.; but at the present moment the man of fifty or thereabouts might have been sixty years of age and more; and with the beginnings of a premature old age, the likeness to his great-minded ancestor had ceased. His tall figure was slightly bent; perhaps he had contracted the habit by stooping over his books, or perhaps the curvature was due to the weight of a head over-heavy for the spine. He was broad-chested and square-shouldered; his lower extremities, though

muscular, were thin ; you could not help casting about for some explanation of this puzzling singularity in a frame which evidently had once been perfectly proportioned. His thick, fair hair fell carelessly over his shoulders in the German fashion, in a disorder which was quite in keeping with a strange air of slovenliness and general neglect. His forehead was broad and high ; the prominence of the region to which Gall has assigned ideality was very strongly marked. The clear, dark-blue eyes seemed to have a power of keen and quick vision, a characteristic often noted in students of occult sciences. The shape of the nose had doubtless once been perfect ; it was very long, the nostrils had apparently grown wider by involuntary tension of the muscles in the continual exercise of the sense of smell. The hollows in a face which was beginning to age seemed all the deeper by force of contrast with the high cheek-bones, thickly covered with short hair. The mouth with its gracious outlines seemed, as it were, to be imprisoned between the nose and a short, sharply turned-up chin.

Certain theorists, who have a fancy for discerning animal resemblances in human countenances, would have seen in the long, rather than oval, face of Balthazar Claes a likeness to the head of a horse. There was no softness or roundness about its outlines ; the skin was tightly drawn over the bones as if it had shrunk under the scorching influence of a fire that burned within ; there were moments when the eyes looked out into space as if seeking for the realization of his hopes ; and at such times this fire that consumed him seemed to escape from his nostrils.

There are deep thoughts which seem to be living forces of which great men are the embodiment ; some such thought seemed to be visibly expressed in the pale face with its deeply-carved wrinkles, to have scored the furrows on a brow like that of some old king full of cares, and to shine forth most clearly from the brilliant eyes ; the fire in them seemed to be



fed by the temperate life which is the result of the tyrannous discipline of great ideas, and by the fires of a mighty intelligence. They were deeply set and surrounded by dark circles, which seemed to tell of long vigils and of terrible prostration of mind consequent on reiterated disappointments, of hopes that sprang up anew only to be blighted, of wear and tear of body and mind. Art and science are jealous divinities; their devotees betray themselves by unmistakable signs. There was a dreamy abstractedness and aloofness in Balthazar Claes' manner and bearing which was quite in keeping with the magnificent head so lacking in human quality. His large hands, covered with hair, were soiled; there were jet-black lines at the tips of the long finger-nails. There was an air of slovenliness about the master of the house which would not have been tolerated in any of its other inmates.

His shoes were seldom cleaned, or the laces were broken or missing. His black cloth breeches were covered with stains, buttons were lacking on his waistcoat, his cravat was askew, his coat had assumed a greenish tint, here and there the seams had given way; everything about him, down to the smallest trifle, combined to produce an uncouth effect, which in another would have indicated the lowest depths of outcast misery, but in Balthazar Claes it was the neglect of genius.

Vice and genius bring about results so similar that ordinary people are often misled by them. What is genius but a form of excess which consumes time and money and health and strength? It is an even shorter road to the hospital than the path of the prodigal. Men, moreover, appear to pay more respect to vice than to genius; for they decline to give it credit or credence. It would seem that genius concerns itself with aims so far remote, that society is shy of casting accounts with it in its lifetime; such poverty and wretchedness are clearly unpardonable. Society prefers to have nothing to do with genius.

Yet there were moments when it would have been hard

to refuse admiration to Balthazar Claes—moments when, in spite of his absent-mindedness and mysterious preoccupation, some impulse drew him to his fellows, and the face of the thinker was lighted up by a kindly thought expressed in the eyes, the hard light in them disappeared, and he looked round him and returned (so to speak) to life and its realities; at such times there was an attractive beauty in his face, a gracious spirit looked forth from it. Any one who saw him then would regret that such a man should lead the life of a hermit, and add that "he must have been very handsome in his youth." A vulgar error. Balthazar Claes had never looked more interesting than at this moment. Lavater would certainly have studied the noble head, have recognized the unwearying patience, the stainless character, the steadfast loyalty of the Fleming, the great and magnanimous nature, the power of passion that seemed calm because it was strong. Such a man would have been a constant and devoted friend, his morals would have been pure, his word sacred; all these qualities should have been dedicated to the service of his country, to his own circle of friends, and to his family; it was the will of the man which had given them a fatal misdirection; and the citizen, the responsible head of a household and disposer of a large fortune, who should have been the guide of his children towards a fair future, lived apart in a world of his own in converse with a familiar spirit, a world in which his duties and affections counted for nothing. A priest would have seen in him a man inspired by God, an artist would have hailed him as a great master, an enthusiast might have taken him for some seer after the pattern of Swedenborg.

As he stood by the window, his ragged, disordered, and threadbare costume was in strange contrast with the graceful dainty attire of the woman who watched him so sadly. A nice taste in dress often distinguishes persons of mental ability or refinement of soul who suffer from bodily deformity. They

are conscious that their beauty is the beauty of mind and soul, and are content to dress simply, or they discover how to divert attention from their physical defects by a studied elegance in every detail. And the woman in the low chair had not only a generous soul, but she loved Balthazar Claes with that woman's intuition which is a foretaste of the intelligence of angels. She had been brought up in one of the noblest families of Belgium, so that even if her taste had not been instinctive it would have been acquired; and, tutored since then by her desire to please the eyes of the man she loved, she had learned to dress herself admirably, and to adopt a style which subdued the effect of her deformity. Moreover, although one shoulder was certainly larger than the other, there was no other defect in her figure. She glanced through the window into the courtyard, and then into the garden, as if to make sure that no one was within hearing, turned meekly to Balthazar, and spoke in the low tones that Flemish women use, for the love between these two had long since conquered Castilian pride.

"You must be very deep in your work, Balthazar? This is the thirty-third Sunday since you have been to mass or vespers."

Claes made no reply. His wife bowed her head, clasped her hands, and waited, watching him the while. She knew that his silence was due neither to contempt nor to indifference, but to the tyranny of an all-absorbing thought. In the depths of some natures the sensitive delicacy of youth lingers long after youth has departed, and Balthazar Claes would have shrunk from uttering any thought that might wound, however slightly, a woman who was always oppressed with the painful consciousness of her physical deformity. And this dread was ever present with him. He understood, as few men do, how a word or a single glance has the power to efface the happiness of whole years; nay, that such words have a more cruel power, because they are utterly at variance with the constant

tenderness of the past ; for we are so made that our happiness makes us more keenly sensitive to pain, while sorrow has no such power of intensifying a transitory gleam of joy. After a few moments, Balthazar roused himself, gave a quick glance round him, and said, "Vespers?—Ah! the children have gone to vespers."

He stepped towards the window and looked out into the garden, where the tulips blazed in all their glory. Then he stopped suddenly, as if he had come into collision with a wall, and exclaimed, "Why should they not combine in a given time?"

"Can he be going mad?" his terrified wife asked herself.

If the reader is to understand the interest of this scene, and the situation out of which it arose, it will be necessary to glance over the previous history of Balthazar Claes and of the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Real.

Towards the end of the year 1783, M. Balthazar Claes-Molina de Nourho, then twenty-two years of age, might have passed for a "fine gentleman," as we say in France. He had just completed his education in Paris; his manners had been formed in the society of Mme. d'Egmont, a set composed of Frenchmen who came originally of Belgian families, or of Belgians distinguished either by birth or by fortune. Great nobles and persons of the highest fashion, such as the Count of Horn, the Prince of Arembérg, the Spanish Ambassador, and Helvétius were among the Belgian residents in Paris. The young Claes had relations and friends there who introduced him into the great world, just as the great world was about to return to chaos; but, like many young men, he was attracted at first by glory and by knowledge rather than by frivolity. He frequented the society of learned men, waxed enthusiastic for science, and became an ardent disciple of Lavoisier, who was then better known for the vast fortune he had acquired as farmer-general of taxes than for the scientific

discoveries which were to make the name of the great chemist famous long after the farmer-general was forgotten.

But Claes was young, and as handsome as Helvétius, and Lavoisier was not his only instructor. Under the tuition of women in Paris he soon learned to distil the more volatile elixirs of wit and gallantry; and although he had previously thrown himself into his studies with an enthusiasm that had won the commendations of his master, he deserted Lavoisier's laboratory to take final lessons in good manners under the guidance of the arbitresses of good manners and good taste, the queens of the high society which forms a sort of family all over Europe.

These intoxicating dreams of success did not last long however; Balthazar Claes breathed the air of Paris for a while; and then, in no long time, he turned his back on the capital, wearied by the empty life, which had nothing in it to satisfy an enthusiastic and affectionate nature. It seemed to him that the quiet happiness of family life, a vision called up by the very name of his native Flanders, was the life best suited to his character and to the aspirations of his heart. The gilding of Parisian salons had not effaced old memories of the sombre harmonies of the parlor in the old house in Douai, of the little garden, and the happy days of his childhood.

Those who would fain dwell in Paris should have no ties of home or of fatherland. Paris is the chosen city of the cosmopolitan, or of those who are wedded to social ambition; by means of art, science, or political power, they gain a hold on the world which they never relax.

The child of Flanders went back to the house in Douai as La Fontaine's pigeon flew home to its nest. It was the day of the Fête Gayant, and tears came into his eyes at the sight of the procession. Gayant, the Luck of the city, the embodiment of the spirit of old Flemish traditions, had been introduced into Douai since his family had been driven to take refuge there. The Maison Claes was empty and silent; his

father and mother had died during his absence, and for some time family affairs required his presence there.

After the first sorrow for his loss his thoughts turned to marriage. All the sacred ties which bound him to his home and the pieties of the hearth had reawakened a strong desire in him to complete the happy existence of which he had dreamed; he determined to do as his forefathers had done, and went to Ghent, to Bruges, and to Antwerp in search of a bride. He probably had ideas of his own as to marriage, for it had always been said of him from his earliest youth that he never could keep to the beaten track, or do as other people did.

It so fell out that one day while on a visit to one of his relations in Ghent, he heard of a young lady in Brussels concerning whom opinions differed considerably. Some considered that Mlle. Temninck's beauty was quite spoiled by her deformity, others hotly insisted that she was perfection. Among these last was Balthazar Claes' somewhat elderly cousin, who told his guests that, beautiful or no, Mlle. Temninck had a soul which would have induced him to marry her if he had been choosing a wife. And with that he told how she had given up all her claims on the family estate so that her younger brother might make a marriage befitting his rank and name; thus setting his happiness before her own, and sacrificing her life to him, for it was scarcely to be expected that Mlle. Temninck would marry now that she had no fortune and the bloom of youth was past, when no suitor had presented himself for the heiress in her girlhood.

A few days later Balthazar Claes had obtained an introduction to Mlle. Temninck, now a woman twenty-five years of age, and had fallen deeply in love with her. Josephine de Temninck chose to regard this as a passing fancy, and refused to listen to M. Claes; but the influence of passion is very subtle, and in this love for her in a man who had youth and good looks and a straight, well-knit frame, there was something

so attractive to the poor lame and deformed girl that she yielded to it.

Could a whole volume suffice to tell the story of the love that thus dawned in the girl's heart? The world had pronounced her to be plain, and she had meekly acquiesced in the decision, conscious though she was of possessing the irresistible charm which calls forth true and lasting love. And now at the prospect of happiness, what fierce jealousy awoke in her, what wild projects of vengeance if a rival stole a glance, what agitations and fears such as seldom fall to the lot of women, which cannot but lose by being passed over in a few brief words! The analysis must be minute. Doubt, the dramatic element in love, would be the keynote of a story in which certain souls would find once more the poetry of those early days of uncertainty, long since lost but not forgotten. The ecstasy in the depths of the heart which the face never betrays, the fear of not being understood, and the unspeakable joy of a swift response; the misgivings which lead the soul to shrink within itself; the moments when, as if drawn forth by some magnetic power, the soul reveals itself in the eyes by infinite subtle shades; wild thoughts of suicide that arise at a word, only to be laid to rest by a tone in a voice whose vibrations reveal unsuspected depths of feeling; tremulous glances full of terrible audacity; swift, passionate longings to speak or act rendered powerless by their very vehemence; communings of soul with soul in commonplace phrases which owe all their eloquence to the faltering of the voice; mysterious workings of that divine discretion and modesty of soul which is generous in the shade, and finds exquisite delight in sacrifices which can never be recognized; youthful love, in short, with the weaknesses of its strength.

Mlle. Josephine de Temninck was a coquette through loftiness of soul. The painful consciousness of her deformity made her as unapproachable and hard to please as the prettiest of women. She dreaded that a day would come when her

lover would cease to care for her, and the thought awakened her pride and destroyed her confidence in herself. With stoical firmness, she locked away in her inmost heart the first feelings of happiness in which other women love to deck themselves in the eyes of the world. The more love drew her to Balthazar Claes, the less she dared to give expression to love. A glance, a gesture, a question, or a response from a pretty woman would have been flattering to a man; but for her, was not any advance a humiliating speculation? A pretty woman can be herself, people look leniently on her follies or mistakes; but a single glance has power to stop the play of expression on a plain woman's features, to make her still more timid, shy, and awkward. Does she not know that she of all women can afford no blunders; that no indulgence will be extended to her; nay, that no one will give her any opportunity of repairing them? She must always be faultless; does not the thought chill and dishearten her while the constant strain exhausts her powers? Such a woman can only live in an atmosphere of divine indulgence, and where can the hearts be found in which indulgence is not poisoned by a lurking taint of pity?

There is a sort of consideration more painful to sensitive souls than even positive unkindness, for it aggravates their misfortunes by continually giving them prominence. The cruel politeness of society was intolerable to Mlle. de Temninck. She schooled herself into self-repression, forced back into some inner depth the most beautiful thoughts that rose in her soul, and took refuge in an icy reserve of manner and bearing. She only dared to love in secret, and was eloquent or charming only in solitude. She was plain and insignificant in broad daylight, but she would have been a beautiful woman if she could have lived by candlelight. Not seldom she had made perilous trials of Balthazar's love, risking her whole happiness to be the surer of it, disdaining the aid of dress and ornaments, by which the effect of deformity could be softened



or concealed, and the Spaniard's eyes grew full of witchery when she saw that even thus she was beautiful for Balthazar Claes.

Yet even the rare moments when she ventured to give herself up to the joy of being loved were embittered by distrust and fears. Before long she began to ask herself whether Claes wished to marry her that he might have a docile slave, whether he had not some defect which made him content to wed a poor deformed girl. The doubts and anxieties which continually harassed her made those hours unspeakably precious, in which she felt sure that this was a true and lasting love which should make her amends for all the slights of the world. She provoked discussions on the delicate subject of her own plainness, dwelling upon it and exaggerating it that she might the better probe her lover's nature, and came in this way by some truths but little flattering; yet she loved him for the perplexity in which he found himself when she had led him on to say that a woman is most beloved for a beautiful soul and for the devotion which makes the days of life flow on in quiet happiness; that after a few years of marriage a wife may be the loveliest woman on earth or the plainest, it makes no difference to her husband. In support of this theory he had heaped together such truth as lies in various paradoxical assertions that beauty is of very little consequence, till he suddenly became aware of the ungraciousness of his arguments. All the goodness of his heart was revealed by the tact and delicacy with which he gradually changed his ground and made Mlle. de Temninck understand that for him she was perfect.

Perhaps, in a woman, devotion is the highest height of love. Devotion was not wanting in this girl who did not dare to hope that love would not fail. She felt attracted by the prospect of a struggle in which sentiment was to triumph over beauty; there was something great, she thought, in giving herself to love with no blind faith that love would last; and finally, this happiness, brief as it might prove, must cost

her so dear that she could not refuse to taste it. These questionings and inward struggles gave all the charm, all the varying moods of passion to this exalted nature, and inspired in Balthazar a love that was almost chivalrous.

The marriage took place in the beginning of the year 1795. They went back to Douai to spend the first weeks of their married life in the ancestral home of the Claes. The household treasures there had been increased. Mlle. de Temninck brought with her several fine paintings by Murillo and Velasquez, her mother's diamonds, and the splendid wedding presents sent by her brother, who had succeeded to the title, and was now Duke of Casa-Real. Few women were as happy as Mme. Claes. There was not the slightest cloud in the happiness that lasted for fifteen years, a happiness that, like a bright light, transformed even the most trivial details of daily life.

In most men there are inequalities of character which cause continual dissonances, small weaknesses that lead to bickerings, till the harmony of domestic life is spoiled, and the fair ideals perish. One man may be conscientious and hard working, but he is hard and stern; another is good-natured, but obstinate; a third will love his wife sincerely, but he never knows his own mind; while a fourth is so absorbed in his ambitions that he looks on affection as a debt to be discharged, and if he gives all the vanities of fortune he takes all joy out of the day.

Mediocrity, in short, is by its very nature incomplete, though its sins of omission and commission are not heinous. Clever folk are as changeable as the barometer, genius alone is essentially good. Perfect happiness is accordingly only to be found at either extreme of the intellectual scale; there is a like equability of temperament in the good-natured idiot and in the man of genius, arising in the one case from weakness, and in the other from strength of character. Both are capable of a constant sweetness of temper, which softens the roughnesses of life. In the one its source is an easy good-natured

tolerance, and in the other it springs from indulgence; a man of genius, moreover, is the interpreter of a sublime thought, which cannot fail to bring his whole life into conformity with itself. Both natures are simple and transparent; the one because of its shallowness, the other by reason of its depth. Clever women, therefore, are sufficiently ready to take a dunce as the best substitute for a man of genius.

Balthazar's greatness of character showed itself from the first in the most trivial details of life. Conjugal love was a magnificent thing in his eyes; he determined to develop all its beauty; and, like all powerful characters, he could not bear that there should be any falling short in attainment. His ingenuity continually varied the calm monotony of happiness, and everything that he did bore the stamp of a noble nature. For instance, although he was in sympathy with the philosophical movement of the eighteenth century, he installed a priest in his household until the year 1801 (a step which laid him open to the severe penalties of the Revolutionary code), humoring the bigoted Catholicism which his Spanish wife had imbibed with her mother's milk. After the Roman Catholic worship was restored in France, he went with her every Sunday to mass.

His attachment never quitted the forms of passion. He never asserted the protecting power that women love so well to feel, because to his wife it would have seemed like pity. On the contrary, by a most ingenious form of flattery, he treated her as his equal, and would break into playful rebellion against her authority, as a man will sometimes permit himself to set the power of a pretty woman at defiance. A smile of happiness always hovered upon his lips, and his tones were unvaryingly gentle.

He loved his Josephine for her sake and for his own with a warmth and intensity which is a constant tribute to the beauty and character of a wife. Fidelity, often the result of social, religious, or interested considerations, seemed in his

case to be involuntary, and was always accompanied by the sweet flatteries of the springtime of love. Duty was the sole obligation of marriage which was unknown to these two equally loving beings, for Balthazar Claes found in Josephine de Temninck a constant and complete realization of his hopes. His heart was always satisfied to the full; he was always happy, and never weary of his happiness. As might have been expected, the granddaughter of the house of Casa-Real, with her Spanish blood, possessed the secret of an "infinite variety," but she had no less capacity for a limitless devotion, and a woman's genius lies in devotion, as all her beauty consists in grace. Her love was a blind fanaticism; at a sign from him she would have gone joyfully to her death. Balthazar's delicacy had brought out all the womanly generosity of her nature, and she longed to give more than she received. This mutual exchange of a happiness which each in turn lavished upon the other visibly centered her life without her and filled her words, her looks, and actions with a love that only grew stronger with time. On all sides gratitude enriched and varied the life of the heart, just as the certainty that each lived only for the other made littleness impossible, and the least accessories of such a life ceased to be trivialities.

But in the whole feminine creation are there any happier women than the deformed wife who is not crooked for the eyes she loves, the lame woman when her husband would not have her other than she is, and the wife grown old and gray who is still young for him? Human passion can go no further than this. When a woman is adored for what is usually regarded as a defect, is not this her greatest glory? It is easy to forget in a moment's fascination that a woman does not walk straight; but when she is loved because she is lame, it is the apotheosis of her infirmity. In the evangel of women these words should perhaps be written, "Blessed are the imperfect, for theirs is the kingdom of love." And of a truth beauty must be a misfortune for a woman, for the flower of

beauty that withers so soon counts for so much in the feeling that she inspires ; is she not loved for her beauty as an heiress is wedded for her gold ? But a woman without this perishable dower, after which the children of Adam seek so eagerly, knows the love that is love indeed, the inmost mystery of passion, the union of soul with soul. The day of disillusion can never come for her. Her charm is not recognized by the world, she owes it no allegiance, and is fair for one alone ; and when she makes it her glory that her defects should be forgotten, she cannot but succeed in her aim.

Accordingly, the best-loved women in history have been by no means perfectly beautiful for ordinary eyes ; Cleopatra, Joanna of Naples, Diana of Poitiers, Mlle. de la Vallière, Mme. de Pompadour, and nearly all women famous throughout the world for the love which they once inspired, have had their defects and shortcomings, while others of whom it is recorded that there was no flaw in their loveliness have over and over again seen love end in piteous tragedy. Do mankind live, after all, rather by sentiment than by pleasure ? Perhaps there is a limit to the charm of mere physical beauty, while the beauty of the soul is infinite ? Is not this the moral of the tale which forms a setting to the "Arabian Nights ?" If Henry VIII. had found a hard-featured wife, she might have defied the axe and retained the wandering fancy of her royal master.

Mme. Claes was ill educated, a curious circumstance, but explainable enough in the daughter of a Spanish grandee. She could read and write, but until her parents took her from the convent where her girlhood was spent (that is to say, until she was twenty years old) she had read nothing but the works of religious ascetics. On her entrance into society, and for a little while after, she had been too eager for amusement to learn anything but the frivolous arts of the toilet ; and later, she had been so deeply mortified by her ignorance that she never ventured to take any part in conversation, and was

set down in consequence as an unintelligent girl. But one result of her neglected and mystical education had been that her natural capacities for thought and feeling had been unspoiled. In society she was as plain and uninteresting as an heiress; but for her husband she grew beautiful and thoughtful.

Balthazar made some attempt, it is true, in the early years of their marriage to teach his wife, so that she might not feel at a disadvantage in this way, but doubtless he was too late, for Josephine had no memory save that of the heart. She never forgot a syllable that he let fall concerning themselves; every least detail of their happy life was fresh in her mind, while yesterday's lesson was forgotten. This invincible ignorance might have brought about serious discords between many a husband and wife; but Mme. Claes' love for her husband was almost a religion, and the intuition of passionate love and desire to preserve her happiness had made her quick-witted. She so contrived matters that she always appeared to understand, and her ignorance was very seldom too apparent. Not only so, but when two love each other so well that every day seems for them the first day of their love, such vital happiness has a marvelous power of transforming the whole conditions of life. Does it not become like childhood, careless of everything that is not love or joy and laughter?

While the life stirs in us, and its fires burn fiercely, we let it burn unthriftilly, nor set ourselves to measure the means or the end. For the rest, Mme. Claes understood her position as a wife better than any daughter of Eve. Her character was a piquant combination of Spanish pride with the submissiveness of the Flamande which makes the domestic hearth so attractive. She was dignified; she could command respect by a glance which revealed a consciousness of her own value and her high descent, but before Claes she trembled. She had set her husband so on high, so near to God, that the thought of what he would say or think controlled her every

thought or action, and her love had come to have a tinge of awe which heightened it. She had made it a point of honor to maintain the old Flemish bourgeois traditions of the house; she had prided herself on the plenty and comfort of her housekeeping, on the classic cleanliness of every detail; everything must be of the best, every dish at dinner must be exquisitely cooked and served. She so ruled things in her household that all their outer life was in harmony with the life of the heart.

They had two boys and two girls. The oldest child, a girl named Marguerite, was born in 1796; the youngest, a three-year-old boy, they had called Jean Balthazar. Motherly love was almost as strong in Mme. Claes as her affection for her husband. Sometimes, especially in the last years of her life, there was a cruel struggle between love for her husband and love for her children, when two claims upon her heart so nearly equal had become in some sort antagonistic. This was the domestic drama hidden away in the sleepy old house, and in the scene with which the story opens her tears and the anguish on her face were caused by a fear that she had sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805 Mme. Claes' brother had died, leaving no children. His sister, according to Spanish law, could not inherit the estates, which passed with the title to the heir-at-law; but the Duke had left to her about sixty thousand ducats, and the representative of the younger branch of the house did not challenge the will. No thought of interest had ever mingled with their love; yet Josephine found a certain satisfaction in the thought that her fortune now equaled that of her husband, and was glad that in her turn she brought something to him from whom she had been generously content to receive everything. So it chanced that Balthazar's marriage, which prudent people had condemned, turned out to be a good match from a worldly point of view.

It was a sufficiently difficult problem to know what to do

with the money. The Maison Claes was so rich in treasures of art, in pictures and valuable furniture, that it was scarcely possible to find anything worthy of being added to such a collection, formed by the taste of their ancestors. The noble collection of pictures had been begun by one generation and completed by those that followed, a love of art having thus become a family tradition. There were fifty paintings in the state apartments on the first floor, and in the long gallery which connected those rooms with the quarter in which the family lived there were more than a hundred famous pictures by Rubens, Ruysdael, Van Dyck, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouwerman, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. Three centuries of patient research had assembled them. Examples of the French and Italian schools were in the minority, but nevertheless they were all of them genuine and of capital importance.

Another generation had been amateurs of Oriental porcelain. Some Claes, long dead and gone, had been an enthusiastic collector of old furniture or of silver plate; Balthazar's own father, the last survivor of the once famous Dutch society, had bequeathed to his son one of the finest known collections of tulips; there was not a Claes but had left some trace of his ruling passion, and every Fleming is a born collector. The old house was superbly furnished with heirlooms, which represented vast sums of money. Without, it was as smooth and bare as a sea-shell, and like a shell it was decked within with fair colors and radiant mother-of-pearl.

Balthazar Claes also possessed a country house in the plain of Orchies. So far from adopting the French plan and living up to his income, he never spent more than one-fourth of it, following old Batavian usages. This put him on the same footing as the wealthiest persons in Douai, for their yearly expenditure never exceeded twelve hundred ducats.

In the days when the Civil Code became the law of the land, the wisdom of this course was abundantly evident. By



virtue of the clause *des Successions*, which divides the estate in equal shares among the children, each child's share would have been small, and the treasures stored for so long in the house of Claes must have one day been dispersed. With his wife's concurrence Balthazar invested Mme. Claes' fortune in such a manner as to secure to each of their children a position similar to that in which they had been brought up, and the house of Claes was still kept up on the old footing. They bought woods which had suffered somewhat in the recent wars, but which in ten years' time, with due care, were likely to increase enormously in value.

The society in which M. Claes moved consisted of the oldest families of Douai. His wife's noble qualities and character were so thoroughly appreciated, that by a sort of tacit agreement the social regulations so stringently enforced in old-fashioned towns were somewhat relaxed in her case. During the winter months, which were always spent in Douai, she seldom left her house, and went very little into society—society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three large dinner parties every month. It was generally recognized that Mme. Claes felt more at ease in her own house, and she herself was little inclined to leave it; her love for her husband and her children, whom she was bringing up very carefully, kept her at home.

Until the year 1809 there was no change in the ways of the household, thus privileged to form an exception to accepted social rules. The life of these two beings, with its hidden depths of love and joy, flowed on to all appearance like other lives. Balthazar Claes' passion for his wife, which she had known how to keep, seemed, as he himself said, to have determined his bent, and his innate perseverance was employed in the cultivation of happiness, as he had cultivated tulips in his youth; it absolved him from the necessity for a mania traditional in his family. But at the end of the year a change came over Balthazar; it came about so imperceptibly that at

first Mme. Claes did not think it necessary to ask the reason of these ominous signs. One evening he seemed preoccupied as he went to bed, and she conscientiously respected his mood. Her woman's tact and habits of submission had always led her to wait for Balthazar's confidence; she felt far too sure of his affection to give way to jealousy. Yet though she knew that any inquiry would meet with a prompt answer, the old impressions of early life had given her an instinctive dread of a rebuff. Her husband's moral malady went through many stages, and only by slow degrees did it assume an acute form, and grow so intolerably violent that at last the happiness of a whole household was destroyed. However engrossing Balthazar's thoughts might be, he was ready for many months to lay them aside to talk with her; and there was no alteration in his affection, his frequent silent moods were the only indications of the change that was being wrought in his character.

It was long before Mme. Claes gave up the hope that her husband would approach the subject himself and tell her about his mysterious preoccupations. Sometimes she thought that he was waiting until there should be some practical result of his labors; there is a kind of pride in so many men which leads them to fight their battles alone and to appear only as victors. In that day of triumph the light of happiness would shine all the more brightly for being withdrawn for a while, and Balthazar's love would fill up all the blank spaces in the page of life, blanks for which his heart was not to blame. Josephine knew her husband well enough to know that he would never forgive himself if he discovered that his Pepita's happiness had been overcast for so many months. So she kept silence, and felt it a kind of joy to suffer through him and for him; for in her passion there was a trace of the piety of the Spaniard, which can never distinguish between religion and love, and cannot understand a love without suffering. She waited for a return of affection, saying to herself every

evening, "It will surely come to-morrow!" as if love were an absent wanderer. During all these secret troubles she was expecting her youngest child. There had been a horrible revelation of a wretched future. Everything seemed to draw her husband from her, and even in his love he was preoccupied. Her woman's pride, wounded for the first time, sounded the depths of the mysterious gulf which separated her from the Claes of their early married life. From that time things grew worse and worse. Claes, who but lately had been immersed in family happiness, who played with his children for whole hours together at romping games on the carpet, in the parlor, or in the garden walks, who seemed as if he could only live beneath the dark eyes of his Pepita, did not notice his wife's condition, forgot to share in the family life, and seemed to forget his own existence.

The longer Mme. Claes delayed to ask the reason of his preoccupation, the more her courage failed her. Her blood seemed to boil at the thought, and her voice died in her throat. At last she felt convinced that her husband had ceased to care for her, and grew seriously alarmed. This dread grew upon her; she brooded over it till her hours were filled with unhappy musings and feverish excitement, and she began to despair. She justified Balthazar at her own expense, telling herself that she was old and ugly. Then it seemed to her that she saw a generous motive, humiliating though it might be to her pride, in his absorption in his work; it was a kind of negative faithfulness; she determined to give him back his independence by bringing about a secret divorce, that clue to the apparent happiness of not a few households. Yet before renouncing their old life, she made an effort to read her husband's heart—and found it shut.

She saw how Balthazar, by slow degrees, became indifferent to everything that had once been dear to him; he cared no longer for his tulips in flower; he seemed to have forgotten the very existence of his children. Clearly this passion was one

of those that lie without the pale of the heart's affections, but which no less, as women think, dry up the springs of affection. Love slept, but had not fled. This was some comfort, though the trouble itself remained as heretofore; and hope, the explanation of all situations like these, prolonged the crisis.

Sometimes, just as the poor wife's despair had grown to such a pitch that she had gathered courage to question her husband, there would be a brief interval of happiness, and Balthazar would make it clear to her that though he might be in the clutches of some diabolical thought, it was a thought which still permitted him to be himself again at times. In these brief moments, when her sky grew brighter, she was too eager to enjoy the gleam of happiness, too afraid to lose any of it by her importunity, to ask for an explanation; and just as she nerved herself to speak, he would escape her. While the words were on her lips, Balthazar would suddenly leave her, or he would fall into deep musings from which nothing could arouse him.

Before very long there set in a reaction of the mental on the physical existence. The havoc thus wrought was scarcely visible at first, save to the eyes of a loving woman, who watched for a clue to her husband's inmost thoughts in their slightest manifestations. She could often scarcely keep back the tears as she saw him fling himself down after dinner into an easy-chair by the fireside, and sit there with his eyes fixed on one of the dark panels, gloomy, abstracted, utterly heedless of the dead silence about him. She watched, too, with an aching heart the gradual changes for the worse in the face that love had made sublime for her; it seemed as if the life of the soul was day by day withdrawing itself and leaving an expressionless mask. At times his eyes grew glassy, as if the faculty of sight in them had been converted to a power of inner vision. After the children had gone to bed, after long silent hours full of painful and solitary brooding, poor Pepita

would venture to ask, "Do you feel ill, dear?" Sometimes Balthazar would not answer at all, or he came to himself with a start like a man suddenly awakened from sleep, and said, "No," in harsh, sepulchral tones, which fell heavily on his wife's quivering heart.

Josephine tried at first to keep this anomalous state of things in their household a secret from the outer world, but this proved to be impossible. Balthazar's behavior was known and discussed in every coterie, in every salon; and, as frequently happens in little towns, certain circles were better informed as to the Claes' affairs than Mme. Claes herself. Several of her friends broke through the silence prescribed by politeness, and showed so much solicitude on her account, that she hastened to explain her husband's singular conduct.

"M. Balthazar," she said, "was engaged on a great work. It took up all his time and energies; but if it succeeded, it would make him famous, and his native town would have reason to be proud of him."

Patriotic enthusiasm runs high in Douai; you would be hard put to it to find a town more eager for distinction; the prospect of glory was gratifying to local vanity; there was a reaction in people's minds, and M. Claes' proceedings were viewed more respectfully.

His wife's guesses were not so very far from the truth. Workmen had been employed for some time past in the garret above the state apartments, whither Balthazar went every morning. He spent more and more of his time up there now, until at last he was in the garret all day long, and his wife and the rest of the family fell in with the new ways by degrees.

But Mme. Claes had yet to learn, to her unspeakable anguish, that her husband was always buying scientific apparatus in Paris; that books, machines, and costly materials of all kinds were being sent to him; and that he was bent on discovering the philosopher's stone. All this she must hear through the officious kindness of friends who were surprised

to find her in ignorance of her husband's doings. It was a bitter humiliation. These friends proceeded to say that she ought to think of her children and of her own future, and that she would be doing very wrong if she did not use her influence with her husband to turn him from the paths of error into which he had strayed. Mme. Claes might summon a great lady's insolence to her aid, and silence this absurd talk; but a sudden terror seized her in spite of her confident tone, and she determined that she would no longer efface herself. She would choose her ground, and speak to her husband on an equal footing; and so, feeling less tremulous, she ventured to ask Balthazar for the cause of the change in him and the reason of his continual seclusion. The Fleming frowned as he answered her—

“My dear, you would not understand it in the least.”

One day Josephine had begged hard to know this secret, playfully grumbling that she who shared his life might not share all his thoughts.

“If you want to know about it so much,” Balthazar answered, seeing his wife on her knees, “I will tell you. I am studying chemistry,” he said, stroking her black hair, “and I am the happiest man in the world.”

Two years after the winter in which M. Claes began his experiments, the house was no longer the same. Perhaps the chemist's abstracted ways had given offence; perhaps his acquaintances felt themselves to be in the way; or it may have been that the anxieties of which Mme. Claes never spoke had altered her, and people found her less charming than heretofore. Whatever the cause might be, she only received visits from her most intimate friends, and Balthazar went nowhere. He shut himself up in his laboratory all day, and sometimes all night; his family never saw him except at dinner. After the second year the winter and summer were alike spent in Douai; his wife had no desire to leave Balthazar and go alone to their country house.

Balthazar would take long solitary walks, sometimes only returning on the following day. Those were long nights of sickening anxiety for his wife. In Douai, as in most fortified towns, the gates of the city were shut at a fixed hour; when search and inquiry within the walls had been made in vain, poor Mme. Claes had not even the support of expectation, half-hope, half-anguish, and must wait till morning as best she might. And in the morning Balthazar would return as if nothing had happened. He had simply forgotten, in his abstraction, the hour at which the gates were closed, and had no suspicion of the torture which he had inflicted on his family. The joy and relief were nearly as perilous for Mme. Claes as terror and suspense had been. She made no comment; she never spoke to him of his wanderings. Once she had begun to ask a question, and she had not forgotten the tone of amazement in which he answered—

“Why, cannot one take a walk?”

The passions cannot be deceived. Mme. Claes' own misgivings bore witness to the truth of the reports which she had at first so lightly contradicted. She had suffered so much from polite conventional sympathy in her youth that she had no wish to experience it a second time. She therefore immured herself more closely than ever in her home, her acquaintances dropped off, and her few remaining friends soon followed suit. This materially added to her discomfort, and gave her additional annoyance and worriment.

Balthazar's slovenly attire was by no means the least of her troubles. There is always something degrading in neglect of this kind for a man who belongs to the upper classes; and she felt it all the more keenly, because she had been used to a Flemish refinement of cleanliness. With the help of Lemulquinier, her husband's valet, Josephine tried for a while to repair the havoc wrought by these pursuits; but the new garments with which, without Claes' knowledge, she replaced the torn, burnt, and stained clothing, were little better than rags

by the end of the day, and she gave up the attempt in despair.

After fifteen years of happiness, it seemed to the wife, who had never known a pang of jealousy, that she counted for nothing in the heart where she had reigned but lately, and the Spaniard in her nature awoke. Science was her rival. Science had won her husband's heart from her, and love renewed its strength in the fires of jealousy that consumed her heart. But what could she do? What resistance could she make against this slowly-growing tyrannous power that never relaxed its hold—this invisible rival who could not be slain? A woman's power is limited by nature; how can she engage in a struggle with an idea, with the infinite delights of thought and charms that are always renewed? What could she attempt in the face of the coquetries of ideas which take new forms and grow fairer amid difficulties, which beckon to the seeker, and lure him on so far from the world that he grows forgetful of all things else, and human love and human ties are as nothing to him?

A day came at last when, in spite of strict orders from Balthazar, his wife determined that at least in bodily presence she would be near him; she also would live in the garret where he had shut himself up, and meet her rival there on her own ground and at close quarters; she would be with her husband during the long hours which he lavished on the terrible mistress who had won his heart from her. She meant to steal into the mysterious workshop, and to earn the right of remaining there. But as she dreaded an explosion of wrath, and feared a witness of the scene, she waited for a day when her husband should be alone, before making her effort to share with Lemulquinier the right of entry into the laboratory. For some time she had watched the man's comings and goings, and almost hated him. Was it not intolerable that the servant should know all that she longed to learn, all that her husband hid from her, and that she did not dare to ask? It seemed to



her that Lemulquinier was more privileged, and stood higher in her husband's estimation than she, his own wife.

So she went to the garret, trembling, yet almost happy, and for the first time in her life was made to feel Balthazar's anger. Scarcely had she opened the door, when he rushed forward and seized her, and pushed her out on to the staircase so roughly that she narrowly escaped a headlong fall.

"God be praised! You are still alive!" cried Balthazar, as he helped her to rise.

The splinters of a shattered glass mask fell about Mme. Claes; she looked up and saw her husband's face, white, haggard, and terrified.

"Dear, I told you not to come here," he gasped, sinking down on a step as if all his strength had left him. "The saints have saved your life. I wonder how it chanced that my eyes were fixed on the door just then. We were all but killed!"

"I should have been very happy to die so," she said.

"My experiment is utterly ruined," Balthazar went on. "I could not forgive any one else for causing me such a grievous disappointment; it is too painful. In another moment I should perhaps have decomposed nitrogen!—There, go back to your own affairs," and Balthazar returned to his laboratory.

"I should perhaps have decomposed nitrogen!" the poor wife said to herself, as she went back to her own room; and once there, she burst into tears.

The phrase conveyed no meaning to her. Men, whose education gives them a certain readiness to deal with new ideas, do not know how painful it is to a woman to lack the power to understand the thoughts of the man she loves. These divine creatures are more indulgent than we are; they do not tell us when they fail to find response to the language of their souls; they shrink from making us feel the superiority of their sentiments, dissemble their pain joyfully, and are

silent about the pleasures that we do not enter into. But they are more ambitious in love than we are; they must do more than wed a man's heart, they must share his thoughts as well. Ignorance of her husband's scientific pursuits gave Mme. Claes a more intolerable heartache than a rival's beauty could have caused. The woman who loves the most is at least conscious of this advantage over her rival; but such neglect as this left her face to face with her utter helplessness; it was a humiliating indifference to all the affections that help us to live.

Josephine loved, but she did not know; and her want of knowledge separated her from her husband. But besides this and beyond this, there lay a last extremity of torture; he was often between life and death, it seemed; under the same roof, and yet far from her, he was risking his life without her knowledge, in dangers which she might not share. It was like hell—a prison for the soul from which there was no way of escape, where there was no hope left. Mme. Claes determined that at any rate she would learn in what the attractions of this science consisted, and privately set herself to read works on chemistry. Then the house became like a convent.

The "Maison Claes" had passed through all these successive changes, and by the time that this story commences was almost "dead to the world."

The crisis grew more complicated. Like all impassioned natures, Mme. Claes never thought of herself; and those who know love, know that where affection is concerned money is of small moment, and interest and affection are almost incompatible. Yet it was not without a cruel pang that Josephine learned that there was a mortgage of three hundred thousand francs on her husband's estates. There were documents which proved this beyond a doubt, and gave occasion for gossip and dismayed conjecture in the town. Mme. Claes, justly alarmed, felt compelled, proud though she was, to make inquiries of her husband's notary, to confide her anxieties to

him, or to enable him to guess them ; and was forced to hear from the lips of the man of business the humiliating inquiry, "Then has not M. Claes as yet said anything to you about it?"

Luckily, Balthazar's notary was almost a relation. M. Claes' grandfather had married one of the Pierquins of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai ; and ever since the marriage the latter branch, though scarcely acquainted with the Claes, had looked upon them as cousins. M. Pierquin, a young man of six-and-twenty, had just succeeded to his father's position ; he alone, in his quality of notary and kinsman, had the right of entry to the house. Mme. Balthazar Claes had lived for many months in such complete seclusion that she was obliged to go to him for information of a disaster which was already known to every one in Douai.

Pierquin told her that in all probability large sums were owing to the firm which supplied her husband with chemicals. This firm, after making inquiries, had executed all M. Claes' orders without hesitation, and let him have unlimited credit. Mme. Claes commissioned Pierquin to ask them for an account of the goods supplied to her husband. Two months later, MM. Protez and Chiffreville, manufacturing chemists, sent in a statement by which it appeared that a hundred thousand francs were owing to them.

Mme. Claes and Pierquin studied the document with amazement that increased with each fresh item. Among enigmatical entries, commercial expressions, and undecipherable scientific hieroglyphs, it gave them a shock to find mention of diamonds and precious metals, albeit in small quantities, and of mysterious substances, apparently so difficult to procure or to produce that they were enormously valuable. The vast number of different items, the cost of carriage and of packing valuable scientific instruments and delicately adjusted machinery for transit, the expense of all the apparatus, together with the

fact that many of the chemical compounds had been specially prepared by M. Claes' directions, accounted sufficiently for the startling amount of the total.

In the interests of his cousin, the notary made inquiries concerning MM. Protez and Chiffreville, and the accounts which he received of them convinced him that they had been perfectly honest in their dealings with M. Claes ; indeed, they had been more than honest, they had gone out of their way to keep him informed of the discoveries of Parisian chemists in order to save him expense.

Mme. Claes entreated Pierquin to keep the singular nature of these transactions a secret. If they were known in the town, all Douai would say at once that her husband was mad. But Pierquin told her that this was impossible ; that he had obtained all possible delay already ; and that as the bills for such large amounts had been formally noted, the secret was not in his keeping. He laid bare the whole extent of the wound, telling his cousin that if she could not contrive to prevent her husband from squandering his money in this reckless way, the family estates would be mortgaged up to their value in less than six months. As to making any effort himself, he added that he, Pierquin, had spoken to his cousin on the subject, with due deference, more than once, and that it had been utterly useless. Balthazar had answered once for all that in all his researches his object was to make a fortune and a famous name for his family. So in addition to the anguish which had clutched at Josephine's heart for the past two years—a cumulative torture, in which every sad or happy memory of the past added to the pain of the present—she was to know a horrible unceasing dread of worse to follow, of an appalling future.

A woman's presentiments are often marvelously correct. How is it that women fear so far oftener than they hope in all matters relating to this present life. Why do they reserve all their faith for religious beliefs in a future world ? How is it

that they are so quick to discern coming trouble or any turning-point in our career? Perhaps the very closeness of the tie that binds a woman to the man she loves makes her an admirable judge of his capacity and with the instinct of love she estimates his faculties and knows his tastes, his passions, his faults, and good qualities. She is always studying these forces of man's destiny, and with the intimate knowledge of the causes comes the fatal gift of foreseeing their effects under all conceivable conditions. Women derive their insight into the future from their clear-sightedness in such things as they see in the present, and the accuracy of their forecasts is due to the perfection of their nervous organization, which enables them to detect and interpret the slightest sign of thought or feeling. They feel the great storms that shake another soul, and every fibre in them vibrates in harmony. They feel or they see. And Mme. Claes, though estranged from her husband for two years, felt that the loss of their fortune was impending.

In Balthazar's passionate persistence she had seen the reflection of his fiery enthusiasm. If it were true that he was trying to discover the secret of making gold, he would certainly fling his last morsel of bread into the crucible with perfect indifference; but what was he seeking to discover?

So far she had loved husband and children without attempting to distinguish the claims of either upon her heart. Balthazar had loved the children as she did; the children had never come between them. Now, all at once she discovered that she was at times more a mother than a wife, as heretofore she had been a wife rather than a mother. Yet she felt that she was ready even yet to sacrifice herself, her fortune, and her children to the welfare of the man who had loved and chosen and adored her, the man for whom she was still the only woman in the world; and then came remorse that she should love her children so little, and despair at being placed between two hideous alternatives. Her heart suffered

as a wife, as a mother she suffered in her children, and as a Christian she suffered for it all. She said nothing of the terrible conflict in her soul. After all, her husband was the sole arbiter of their fate; he was the master who must shape their destinies; he was accountable to God and to none other. How could she reproach him with putting her fortune to such uses, after the disinterestedness which had been so amply proved during the first ten years of their married life? Was she a judge of his designs? And yet her conscience asserted what she knew to be in keeping with all laws written and unwritten, that parents possess their fortune not for themselves, but for their children, and have no right to alienate the worldly wealth which they hold in trust for them.

Rather than take it upon herself to solve these intricate problems, she had chosen to shut her eyes to them; like a man on the brink of a precipice, who will not look into the yawning depths into which he knows that he must sooner or later fall.

For the past six months her husband had allowed her nothing for housekeeping expenses. The magnificent diamonds which her brother had given to her on the day of her marriage had been secretly sold in Paris, and she had put the whole household on the most economical footing. She had dismissed the children's governess, and even little Jean's nurse. Formerly the luxury of a carriage had been quite unknown among the Flemish burghers, who lived so simply and held their heads so high. So there had been no provision in the *Maison Claes* itself for this modern innovation, and Balthazar had been obliged to have his stables and coach-house on the opposite side of the street. Since he had been absorbed in chemistry he had ceased to superintend that part of the ménage, essentially a man's province, and *Mme. Claes* put down the carriage. She was so much of a recluse that the expense was as useless as it was heavy; and this would have been reason sufficient to give for her retrenchments, but she did not

attempt to give color to them by any pretexts. Hitherto facts had given the lie to her words, and now silence became her best.

Such changes as these, moreover, were almost inexcusable in Holland, where any one who lives up to his income is looked on as a madman. Only as her oldest girl, Marguerite, was now nearly sixteen years old, Josephine would wish her to make a great match, it was thought, and to establish her in the world in a manner befitting the daughter of the house of Claes, connected as it was with the Molinas, the Van Ostrom-Temmincks, and the Casa-Reals. The money realized by the sale of the diamonds had been exhausted some few days before the opening scene of this story. On that very afternoon, as Mme. Claes had met Pierquin on her way to vespers with her children, he had turned and walked with them as far as the Church of Saint Pierre, talking confidentially the while.

"It would be a breach of the friendship which attaches me to your family," he said, "if I were to attempt to conceal from you, cousin, the risks you are running. I must implore you to set them before your husband. Who else has influence sufficient to arrest him on the brink of the precipice? Your estates are so heavily mortgaged that they will scarcely pay interest on the sums borrowed. At this moment you have no income whatever. If you once cut down the woods, your last hope of salvation will be gone. Cousin Balthazar owes thirty thousand francs to Protez and Chiffreville in Paris; how will you pay them? How are you going to live? And what will become of you if Claes keeps on buying acids and alkalis, and glassware, and voltaic batteries, and such like gimcracks? All your fortune has flown off in gas and smuts; you have nothing but the house and the furniture left. A couple of days ago there was some talk of mortgaging the house itself, and what do you think Claes said?—'The devil!' 'Tis the first sign of sense he has shown these three years."

Mme. Claes in her distress clutched Pierquin's arm. "Keep our secret!" she entreated, raising her eyes to heaven.

The words had fallen like a thunderbolt. She sat quietly on her chair among her children, so overcome that she could not pray. Her prayer book lay open on her knee, but she never turned a leaf; her painful thoughts were as all-absorbing as her husband's musings. The sounds of the organ fell on her ears, but Spanish pride and Flemish integrity sent louder echoes through her soul. The ruin of her children was complete! She could no longer hesitate between their claims and their father's honor. The immediate prospect of a collision with Claes appalled her; he was so great in her eyes, so much above her, that the bare idea of his anger was scarcely less fearful than the thought of the wrath of God. She could no longer be so devoutly submissive, a change had come over her life. For her children's sake she must thwart the wishes of the husband whom she idolized.

His thoughts soared among the far-off heights of science, but she must bring him down to the problems of every-day existence; must break in upon his dreams of a fair future, and confront him with the present in its most prosaic aspect, with practical details revolting to artists and great men. For his wife, Balthazar Claes was a giant intellect, a man whose greatness the world would one day recognize; he could only have forgotten her for the most splendid hopes; and then he was so able, so wise and far-seeing, she had heard him speak so well on so many subjects, that she felt no doubt that he spoke the truth when he said that his researches were to bring fame and a fortune to them all. His love for his wife and children was not only great, it was boundless; how could such love come to an end? Doubtless it was stronger and deeper than ever, it was only the form that was changed; and she who was so nobly disinterested, so generous and sensitive, must continually sound the word "money" in the great man's ears;



must make him see poverty in its ugliest shape, and the rattle of coin and cries of distress must break in on the sweet voices that sang of fame.

And suppose that Balthazar's affection for her should grow less? Ah! if she had had no children, how bravely and gladly she would have faced the change he had wrought in her destiny! Women who have been brought up amid wealthy surroundings soon feel the emptiness of the life that luxury may disguise, but cannot fill; it palls on them, but their hearts are not seared; and when once they have discovered for themselves the happiness that lies in a constant interchange of sincere feeling and thought, when they are certain of being loved, they do not shrink from a narrow monotonous existence, if only that existence is the one best suited to the being who loves them. All their own ideas and pleasures are subordinated to the lightest demands of that life without their own; and the future holds but one dread for them—the dread of separation.

At this moment Pepita felt that her children stood between her and her real life, as science had separated Balthazar Claes from her. When she returned from vespers she flung herself down in her low chair, dismissed the children with a caution to make no noise, and sent to ask her husband to come to speak with her; but in spite of the insistence of the old manservant Lemulquinier, Balthazar had not stirred from his laboratory. Mme. Claes had time to think over her position, and had fallen into deep musings, forgetful of the hour and the day. The thought that they owed thirty thousand francs which they could not pay roused painful memories; all the troubles of the past started up to meet the troubles of the present and the future. She was overwhelmed by the problem, the burden grew too heavy for her, and she gave way to tears.

When Balthazar came at last, he looked more abstracted, more formidable, more distraught than she had ever seen him;

and when he gave her no answer, she sat for a while like one fascinated by the vacant unseeing gaze; the remorseless thoughts that had wrung drops of sweat from his brow seemed to exert a spell over her also. With the first shock came the wish that she might die. But the scientific inquiry made in those absent tones roused her courage just as her heart began to fail her; she would grapple with this hideous and mysterious power which had robbed her of her lover, her children of their father, and the family of their wealth, had overclouded all their happiness, and jeopardized the fair name of the house of Claes. Yet she could not help trembling, shudder after shudder ran through her; was it not the most solemn moment of her life—a moment that held all her future—as it was the outcome of all her past?

And at this point, weak-minded people, timid souls, or those who, sensitive by nature, are prone to exaggerate little trials of life, men who, in spite of themselves, feel a nervous tremor when they stand before the arbiters of their fate, may readily imagine the thoughts that crowded up in her mind. Her brain reeled, and her heart grew heavy with pent-up emotion, as she saw her husband go slowly towards the garden door. Few women have not known the misery of such inward debates as hers, so that even those whose hearts have not throbbed violently over a confession of extravagance, or of debts to their dressmaker, will have some faint idea of how terribly the pulse beats when life is at stake. A pretty woman can fling herself at her husband's feet, the graceful attitudes of her sorrow can plead for her, but Mme. Claes was painfully conscious of her deformity, and this added to her fears. When she saw Balthazar about to leave her, her first impulse had been to spring to his side, but a cruel thought restrained her. How could she rise and stand before him? She would appear ridiculous in the eyes of a man who had lost the old illusions of love, and now would see her as she was. Rather than lose one tittle of her power, Josephine would have lost

fortune and children. She would avoid all possible evil influence at this crisis.

"Balthazar !"

He started at the sound of her voice and coughed. Then, without paying any attention to his wife, he turned in the direction of one of the small square spittoons which are placed at intervals along the wainscot in all Dutch and Flemish houses ; the force of old habit and association was so strong in him that the man, who was hardly conscious of the existence of human beings, was always careful of the furniture. This curious trait was a source of intolerable pain to poor Josephine, who could not understand it ; at this moment she lost command over herself, and her agony of mind drew from her a sharp cry of suffering, an exclamation in which all her wounded feelings found expression.

"Monsieur ! I am speaking to you !"

"What does that signify?" answered Balthazar, turning round abruptly, and giving his wife a quick glance. The hasty words fell like a thunderbolt.

"Forgive me, dear ——" she said, with a white face. She tried to rise to her feet, and held out her hand to him, but sank back again exhausted.

"This is killing me !" she said, in a voice broken by sobs.

The sight of tears brought a revulsion in Balthazar, as in most absent-minded people ; it was as if a sudden light had been thrown for him on the mystery of this crisis. He took up Mme. Claes at once in his arms, opened a door which led into the little ante-chamber, and sprang up the staircase so hastily that his wife's dress caught on one of the carved dragon's heads of the balusters ; there was a sharp sound, and a whole breadth was torn away. He kicked open the door of a little room into which their apartments opened, and found that the door of his wife's room was locked. He set Josephine gently down in an armchair, saying to himself, "Good heavens ! where is the key?"



*HE TOOK UP MME. CLAES AT ONCE IN HIS ARMS . . . AND  
SPRANG UP THE STAIRCASE.*





"Thank you, dear," said Mme. Claes, as she opened her eyes. "It is a long while since I have felt so near to your heart."

"Great heavens!" cried Claes. "Where is the key? There are the servants——"

Josephine signed to him to take the key which hung suspended from a riband at her side. Balthazar opened the door and hastily laid his wife on the sofa; then he went out to bid the startled servants remain downstairs, ordered them to serve dinner at once, and hurried back to his wife.

"What is it, dear heart?" he asked, seating himself beside her. He took her hand and kissed it.

"It is nothing," she said; "the pain is over now, only I wish that I had God's power, and could pour all the gold in the world at your feet."

"Why gold?" he asked, as he drew his wife to him, held her tightly in his arms, and kissed her again on the forehead. "Dearest love, do you not give me the greatest of all wealth, loving me as you do?"

"Oh! Balthazar, why should you not put an end to all this wretchedness, as your voice just now dispelled the trouble in my heart? You are not changed at all; I see that now," she replied.

"Wretchedness? What do you mean, dearest?"

"We are ruined, dear."

"Ruined?" he echoed. He began to smile, and fondly stroked the hand which lay in his. When he spoke again there was an unaccustomed tenderness in his voice.

"To-morrow, dearest, we may find ourselves possessed of inexhaustible wealth. Yesterday, while trying to discover far greater secrets, I think I found out how to crystallize carbon, the substance of the diamond.—Oh! dear wife, in a few days' time, you will forgive me for my wandering wits; for they are apt to wander at times, it seems. I spoke hastily just now, did I not? But you will make allowances for me,



the thought of you is always present with me, and my work is all for you, for us——”

“That is enough,” she said; “we will say no more now, dear. This evening we will talk over it all. My trouble seemed more than I could bear, and now joy is almost too much for me.”

She had not thought to see the old tender expression in his face, to hear such gentle tones again in his voice, to recover all that she thought she had lost.

“Certainly,” he said. “Let us talk it over this evening. If I should grow absorbed in something else, remind me of my promise. I should like to forget my calculations this evening, and to surround myself with family happiness, with the pleasures of the heart, for I need them, Pepita, I am longing for them.”

“And will you tell me what you are trying to discover, Balthazar?”

“Why, you would not understand it all if I did, poor little one.”

“That is what you think? But for these four months past I have been reading about chemistry, dear, so that I could talk about it with you. I have read Fourcroy, Lavoisier, Chaptal, Nollet, Rouelle, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, Spallanzani, Leuwenhoek, Galvani, Volta—all the books, in fact, about this science that you adore. Come, you can tell me your secrets now.”

“Oh! you are an angel!” cried Balthazar, falling on his knees beside his wife, and shedding tears that made her tremble. “We shall understand each other in everything!”

“Ah!” she said. “I would fling myself into your furnace fire to hear such words from you, to see you as you are now.”

She heard her daughter's footsteps in the next room, and sprang hastily to the door.

“What is it, Marguerite?” she asked of her eldest girl.

“M. Pierquin is here, mother dear. You forgot to give

out the table-linen this morning, and if he stays here to dinner——”

Mme. Claes drew a bunch of small keys from her pocket and gave them to her daughter, indicating as she did so the cupboards of foreign woods which lined the ante-chamber.

“Take it from the Graindorge linen,” she said, “on the right-hand side.”

“As this dear Balthazar of mine is to come back to me to-day, I should like to have him all complete,” she said, going back to the room with mischievous sweetness in her eyes. “Now, dear, go to your room, and do me a favor—dress for dinner, as Pierquin is here. Just change those ragged clothes of yours. Only look at the stains! And is it muriatic or sulphuric acid which has burned those holes with the yellow edges? Go and freshen yourself up a little; as soon as I have changed my dress, I will send Mulquinier to you.”

Balthazar tried to pass into his room by the door which opened into it, forgetting that it was locked on the other side. He was obliged to go out through the ante-chamber.

“Marguerite,” called Mme. Claes, “leave the linen on the armchair there, and come and help me to dress; I would rather not have Martha.”

Balthazar had laid his hand on Marguerite’s shoulder, and turned her towards him, saying merrily—

“Good evening, little one! You are very charming to-day in that muslin frock and rose-colored sash.”

He grasped Marguerite’s hand in his, and kissed her forehead.

“Mamma!” cried the girl, as she went into her mother’s room, “papa kissed me just now, and he looked so pleased and happy!”

“Your father is a very great man, dear child; he has been working for three years that his family may be rich and illustrious, and now he feels sure that he has reached the end of his ambitions. To day should be a great day for us all.”

"We shall not be alone in our joy, mamma dear; all the servants were sorry, too, to see him look so gloomy—— Oh! not that sash, it is so limp and faded."

"Very well, but we must be quick. I must go down and speak to Pierquin. Where is he?"

"In the parlor; he is playing with Jean."

"Where are Gabriel and Félicie?"

"I hear their voices out in the garden."

"Well, then, just run away downstairs and see after them, or they will pick the tulips; your father has not even seen the tulips all this year, perhaps he would like to go out and look at them after dinner. And tell Mulquinier to take everything your father wants up to his room."

When Marguerite had left her, Mme. Claes went to the window and looked out at her children playing below in the garden. They were absorbed in watching one of those gleaming insects with green, gold-bespangled wings that are popularly called "diamond beetles."

"Be good, my darlings," she said, throwing up the window sash to let the fresh air into the room. Then she tapped gently on the door that opened into her husband's apartment, to make sure that he was not lost once more in a waking dream. He opened it, and when she saw that he was dressing, she said merrily—

"You will not leave me to entertain Pierquin all by myself for long, will you? You will come down as soon as you can?" and she tripped away downstairs so lightly that a stranger hearing her footsteps would not have thought that she was lame. Half-way down the staircase she met Mulquinier.

"When monsieur carried madame upstairs," said the man, "her dress was torn by one of the balusters; not that the scrap of stuff matters at all, but the dragon's head is broken, and I do not know who is to mend it. It quite spoils the staircase; such a handsome piece of carving as it was too!"

"Pshaw! Mulquinier, do not have it mended; it is not a misfortune."

"Not a misfortune?" said Mulquinier to himself. "How is that? What has happened? Can the master have discovered the Absolute?"

"Good-day, M. Pierquin," said Mme. Claes, as she opened the parlor door.

The notary hastened to offer his arm to his cousin, but she never took any arm but her husband's, and thanked him by a smile, as she said, "Perhaps you have come for the thirty thousand francs?"

"Yes, madame. When I reached home I found a memorandum from MM. Protez and Chiffreville, who have drawn six bills, each for five thousand francs, on M. Claes."

"Very well," she answered; "say nothing to-day about it to Balthazar. Stay and dine with us; and if he should happen to ask why you have called, please invent some plausible excuse. Let me have the letter; I will tell him about this affair myself. It will be all right," she went on, seeing the notary's astonishment; "in a very few months my husband will probably pay back all the money which he has borrowed."

The last phrase was spoken in a low voice. The notary meanwhile watched Mlle. Claes, who was coming from the garden, followed by Gabriel and Félicie.

"I have never seen Mlle. Marguerite look so charming," he said.

Mme. Claes, sitting in her low chair, with little Jean on her knees, raised her face and looked from her daughter to the notary with seeming carelessness.

Pierquin was neither short nor tall; stout nor thin; he was good-looking in a commonplace way, with a discontented rather than a melancholy expression; it was not a thoughtful face in spite of its vague dreaminess. He had the name of being

a misanthrope, but he had an excellent appetite, and was too anxious to get on in the world to stand very far aloof from it. He had a trick of gazing into space, an attitude of indifference, a carefully-cultivated talent for silence, which seemed to indicate profound depths of character; but which, as a matter of fact, served to conceal the shallowness and insignificance of a notary whose whole mind was entirely absorbed by material interests. He was still sufficiently young to be emulous and ambitious; the prospect of marrying into the Claes family would have been quite enough to call forth all his zeal, even if he had had no ulterior motive in the shape of avarice, but he was not prepared to act a generous part until he knew his position exactly. When Claes seemed to be in a fair way to ruin himself, the notary grew stiff, curt, and uncompromising as an ordinary man of business; but as soon as he suspected that something after all might come of his cousin's work, he at once became affectionate, accommodating, almost officious; and yet he never sounded his own motives for these naïve changes of manner. Sometimes he looked on Marguerite as an infanta, a princess, to whose hand a poor notary dared not aspire; sometimes she was only a penniless girl, who might think herself lucky if Pierquin condescended to make her his wife. He was a thorough provincial and a Fleming; there was no harm in him; but his transparent selfishness neutralized his better qualities, as his personal appearance was spoiled by his absurd affectations.

As Mme. Claes looked at the notary she remembered the curt way in which he had spoken that day in the porch of St. Peter's Church, and noticed the change in his manner wrought by this evening's conversation. She read the thoughts in the depths of his heart, and gave a keen glance at her daughter, but evidently there was no thought of her cousin in the girl's mind. A few minutes were spent in discussing town talk, and then the master of the house came down from his room. His wife had heard him moving about in the room above with

indescribable pleasure, his step was so quick and light that she pictured Claes grown youthful again, and awaited his coming with such eagerness that in spite of herself a quiver of excitement thrilled her as he came down the staircase.

A moment later Balthazar entered, dressed in a costume of that day. His high boots, reaching almost to the knee, were carefully polished, the tops were turned down, leaving white silk stockings visible. He wore blue kerseymere breeches, fastened with gold buttons, a white-flowered waistcoat, and a blue dress-coat. He had shaved himself and combed and perfumed his hair, his nails had been pared, and his hands washed with so much care that any one who had seen him an hour before would hardly have recognized him again. Instead of an old man almost in his dotage, his wife and children and the notary beheld a man of forty, with an irresistible air of kindness and courtesy. His face was thin and worn, but the hardness and sharpness of outline, which told a tale of weariness and strenuous labor, gave a certain air of refinement to his face.

"Good-day, Pierquin," said Balthazar Claes.

The chemist had become a father and husband again. He took up his youngest child and tossed him up and down.

"Just look at the youngster," he said to the notary. "Doesn't a pretty child like this make you wish you were married? Take my word for it, my dear boy, family pleasures make up for everything——"

"Brr!" he cried, as Jean went up to the ceiling. "Down you come," and he set the child on the floor. Gleeful shrieks of laughter broke from the little one as he found himself so high in the air one moment and so low the next. The mother looked away lest any one might see how deeply she was moved by this game of play. It was such a little thing, yet it meant a revolution in her life.

"Now let us hear how you are getting on," said Balthazar, depositing his son upon the polished floor, and flinging him-

self into an easy-chair; but the little one ran to him at once; some glittering gold buttons peeped out above his father's high boots in a quite irresistible way.

"You are a darling!" said his father, taking him in his arms; "a Claes, every inch of you! You run straight.—Well, Gabriel, and how is Père Morillon?" he said to his eldest son, as he pinched the boy's ear. "Do you manage to hold your own manfully against exercises and Latin translations? Do you keep a good grip on your mathematics?"

Balthazar rose and went over to Pierquin with the courteous friendliness which was natural to him. "Perhaps you have something to ask me, my dear fellow?" he said, as he took the notary's arm and drew him out into the garden, adding as they went, "Come and have a look at my tulips."

Mme. Claes looked after her husband, and could scarcely control her joy. He looked so young, so kindly, so much himself again. She too rose from her chair, put her arm round her daughter's waist, and kissed her.

"Dear Marguerite," she said; "darling child, I love you more than ever to-day."

"Papa has not been so nice for a long, long time."

Le Mulquinier came to announce that dinner was served. Mme. Claes took Balthazar's arm before Pierquin could offer his a second time, and the whole family went into the dining-room.

Overhead the beams and rafters had been left visible in the vaulted ceiling, but the woodwork was cleaned and carefully polished once a year, and the intervening spaces were adorned with paintings. Tall oak sideboards lined the room, the more curious specimens of the family china were arranged on the tiers of shelves, the purple leather which covered the walls was stamped with designs in gold, representing hunting scenes. Here and there above the sideboards a group of foreign shells, or the bright-colored feathers of rare tropical birds, glowed against the sombre background.

The chairs were the square-shaped kind with twisted legs and low backs, covered with fringed stuff, which once were found in every household all over France and Italy. In one of these Raphael seated his "Madonna of the Chair." They had not been changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and the framework was black with age, but the gold-headed nails shone as if they were new only yesterday, and the stuff, carefully renewed from time to time, was a rich deep red. The Flanders of the sixteenth century, with its Spanish innovations, seemed to have risen out of the past.

The wine flasks and decanters on the table preserved in their bulb-shaped outlines the grace and dignity of antique vases; the glasses were the same old-fashioned goblets with long slender stems that are seen in old Dutch pictures. The English earthenware was decorated with colored figures in high relief, Wedgwood's ware and Palissy's designs. The silver was massive, square-sided, and richly ornamented; it was in a very literal sense family plate, for no two pieces were alike, and the rise and progress of the fortunes of the house of Claes might have been traced from its beginnings in the varying styles of these heirlooms.

It will readily be imagined that a Claes would make it a point of honor to have table-linen of the most magnificent kind, and the table-napkins were fringed in the Spanish fashion. The splendors locked away in the state apartments only came to light to grace festival days; their glories were never dimmed, so to speak, by familiarity. This was the linen, plate, and earthenware in daily use, and everything in the quarter of the house where the family lived bore the stamp of a patriarchal quaintness. Add one more charming detail to complete the picture—a vine clambering about the windows set them in a framework of green leaves.

"You are faithful to old traditions, madame," said Pierquin, as he received a plateful of thymy soup, in which there were small rissoles made of meat and fried bread, accord-



ing to the approved Dutch and Flemish recipe, "this is the kind of soup that always made part of the Sunday dinner in our father's time ; it has been a standing dish in the Low Countries for ages, but I never meet with it now except here and in my uncle Des Raquet's house. Oh ! stay a moment though, old M. Savaron de Savarus at Tournai still takes a pride in having it served, but old Flemish ways are rapidly disappearing. Furniture must be of Greek style nowadays ; there are classical bucklers, lances, helmets, and fasces on every mortal thing. Everybody is rebuilding his house, selling his old furniture, melting down his plate, or getting rid of it for Sèvres porcelain, which is nothing like as beautiful as old Dresden or Oriental china. Oh ! I myself am a Fleming to the backbone. It goes to my heart to see coppersmiths buying up beautiful old furniture at the price of firewood for the sake of the metal in the wrought-incrusted copperwork, or the pewter inlaid in it. Society has a mind to change its skin, I suppose, but the changes are more than skin deep ; we are losing the faculty of producing along with the old works of art. There is not time to do anything conscientiously when every one lives in such a hurry. The last time I was in Paris I was taken to see the pictures exhibited in the Louvre, and, upon my honor, they are only fit for firescreens ! Yards of canvas with no atmosphere, no depth of tone. Painters really seem to be afraid of their colors. And they intend, so they say, to upset our old school—Heaven help them !"

"Our old masters used to study their pigments," said Balthazar ; "they used to test them singly and in combinations, submitting them to the action of sunlight and rain. Yes, you are right ; nowadays the material resources of art receive less attention than formerly."

Mme. Claes was not listening to the conversation. The notary's remark that china had come into fashion had set her thoughts wandering, and a bright idea had at once occurred to her. She would sell the massive silver plate which her

brother had left her ; perhaps in that way she might pay the thirty thousand francs.

Presently her husband's voice sounded through her musings. "Aha!" Balthazar was saying, "so they talk about my studies in Douai!"

"Yes," answered Pierquin, "everybody is wondering what it is that you are spending so much money over. I heard the First President, yesterday, lamenting that a man of your ability should set out to find the philosopher's stone. I took it upon myself to reply that you were too learned not to know that it would be attempting the impossible, too good a Christian to imagine that you could prevail over God, and that a Claes was far too shrewd to give hard cash for powder of pimperlomp. Still, I must confess that I share in the regret that is generally felt over your withdrawal from society. You really might be said to be lost to the town. Indeed, madame, you would have been pleased if you knew how highly every one spoke of you and of M. Claes."

"It was very kind of you to put a stop to such absurd reports, which would make me ridiculous if no worse came of it," answered Balthazar. "Oh! so the good folk of Douai think that I am ruined! Very good, my dear Pierquin, on our wedding-day, in two months' time, I will give a fête on a splendid scale, which shall reinstate me in the esteem of our dear money-worshipping fellow-townsmen."

The color rushed into Mme. Claes' face; for the past two years the anniversary had been forgotten. This evening was an interval in Balthazar's life of enthusiasm which might be compared to one of those lucid moments in insanity when the powers of the mind shine with unwonted brilliancy for a little while; never had there been such point and pith and sparkle in his talk, his manner to his children had never been more playfully tender, he was a father once more, and no festival could have given his wife such joy as this. Once more his eyes sought hers with a constant expression of sympathy in

them; she felt a delicious consciousness that the same feeling and the same thought stirred in the depths of either heart.

Old Le Mulquinier seemed to have grown young again; seldom, indeed, had he been known to be in such spirits. The change in his master's manner had even more significance for him than for his mistress. Mme. Claes was dreaming of happiness, but visions of fortune filled the old serving man's brain, and his hopes were high. He had been wont to help with the mechanical part of the work, and perhaps some words let fall by his master when an experiment had failed, and the end seemed farther and farther off, had not been lost on the servant. Perhaps he had become infected with his master's enthusiasm, or an innate faculty of imitation had led Le Mulquinier to assimilate the ideas of those with whom he lived. He regarded his master with a half-superstitious awe and admiration in which there was a trace of selfishness. The laboratory was for him very much what a lottery-office is for many people—hope organized. Every night as he lay down he used to say to himself, "To-morrow, who knows but we may be rolling in gold?" And in the morning he awoke with a no less lively faith.

He was a thorough Fleming, as his name indicated. In past ages the common people were distinguished merely by nicknames; a man was called after the place he came from, after his trade, or after some moral quality or personal trait. But when one of the people was enfranchised, his nickname became his family name, and was transmitted to his burgher descendants. In Flanders, dealers in flax thread were called *mulquiniers*; and the old valet's ancestor, who passed from serfdom into the burgher class, had, doubtless, dealt in linen thread. That had been some generations ago, and now the grandson of the dealer in flax was reduced to the old condition of servitude, albeit, unlike his grandsire, he received wages. The history of Flanders, its flax trade, its industries, and its commerce, was in a manner epitomized in the old

servant, who was often called Mulquinier for the sake of euphony.

There was something quaint in his appearance and character. In person he was tall and thin; his broad, triangular countenance had been so badly scarred by the smallpox that the white shiny seams gave it a grotesque appearance; the little tawny eyes, which exactly matched the color of his sleek, sandy perruque, seemed to look askance at everything. He talked solemnly and mysteriously about the house; his whole bearing and manner excused the curiosity which he awakened. It was believed, moreover, that as an assistant in the laboratory he shared and kept his master's secrets, and he was in consequence invested with a sort of halo of romance. Dwellers in the Rue de Paris watched him as he came and went, with an interest not unmixed with awe; for when questioned he was wont to deliver himself of Delphic utterances, and to throw out vague hints of fabulous wealth. He was proud of being necessary to his master, and exercised, on the strength of it, a petty tyranny over his fellow-servants, taking advantage of his position to make himself master below stairs. Unlike Flemish servants, who become greatly attached to the family they serve, he cared for no one in the house but Balthazar; Mme. Claes might be in trouble, some piece of good fortune might befall the household, but it was all one to Le Mulquinier, who ate his bread and butter and drank his beer with an unmoved countenance.

After dinner, Mme. Claes suggested that they should take coffee in the garden beside the centre bed of tulips. The flowers had been carefully labeled and planted in pots, which were embedded in the earth and arranged pyramid fashion, with a unique specimen of parrot-tulip at the highest point. No other collector possessed a bulb of the *Tulipa Claesiana*. Balthazar's father had many times refused ten thousand florins for this marvel, which had all the seven colors; the edges of its slender petals gleamed like gold in the sun. The older

Claes had taken extraordinary precautions, keeping it in the parlor, lest by any means a single seed should be stolen from him, and had often passed entire days in admiring it. The stem was strong, elastic, erect, and a beautiful green color; the flower cup possessed the perfect form and pure brilliancy of coloring which were once so much sought after in these gorgeous flowers.

"Thirty or forty thousand francs' worth there!" was the notary's comment, as his eyes wandered from the mass of color to Mme. Claes's face; but she was too much delighted by the sight of the flowers, which glowed like precious stones in the rays of the sunset, to catch the drift of this business-like remark.

"What is the good of it all? you ought to sell them," Pierquin went on, turning to Balthazar.

"Pshaw! what is the money to me!" answered Claes, with the gesture of a man to whom forty thousand francs is a mere trifle.

There was a brief pause, filled by the children's exclamations.

"Do look at this one, mamma!"

"Oh, what a beauty!"

"What is this one called, mamma?"

"What an abyss for the human mind!" exclaimed Balthazar, clasping his hands with a despairing gesture. "One combination of hydrogen and oxygen, in different proportions, but under the same conditions, and all those different colors are produced from the same materials!"

The terms which he used were quite familiar to his wife, but he spoke so rapidly that she did not grasp his meaning; Balthazar bethought him that she had studied his favorite science, and said, making a mysterious sign, "You should understand that, but you would not yet understand all that I meant," and he seemed to relapse into one of his usual musing fits.

"I should think so," said Pierquin, taking the cup of coffee

which Marguerite handed him. "Drive nature out by the door and she comes in at the window," he went on, speaking to Mme. Claes in a low voice. "You will perhaps be so good as to speak to him yourself; the devil himself would not rouse him now from his cogitations. He will keep on like this till to-morrow morning, I suppose."

He said good-bye to Claes, who appeared not to hear a syllable, kissed little Jean in his mother's arms, made a profound bow to Mme. Claes, and went. As soon as the great door was shut upon the visitor, Balthazar threw his arm round his wife's waist, and dispelled all her uneasiness over his feigned reverie by whispering in her ear, "I knew exactly how to get rid of him!"

Mme. Claes raised her face to her husband without attempting to hide the happy tears which filled her eyes. Then she let little Jean slip to the ground, and laid her head on Balthazar's shoulder.

"Let us go back to the parlor," she said after a pause.

Balthazar was in the wildest spirits that evening; he invented innumerable games for the children, and joined in them himself so heartily that he did not notice that his wife left the room two or three times. At half-past nine o'clock, when Jean had been put to bed, and Marguerite had helped her sister Félicie to undress, she came down stairs into the parlor, and found her mother sitting in the low chair talking with her father, and saw that her hand lay in his. She turned to go without speaking, fearing to disturb her father and mother, but Mme. Claes saw her.

"Here, come here, Marguerite, dear child," she said, drawing the girl towards her, and kissing her affectionately, "Take your book with you to your room," she added, "and mind you go early to bed."

"Good-night, darling child," said Balthazar.

Marguerite gave her father a good-night kiss and vanished. Claes and his wife were alone for a while. They watched the

last twilight tints fade away in the garden, the leaves turned black, the outlines grew dim and shadowy in the summer dusk. When it was almost dark, Balthazar spoke in an unsteady voice. "Let us go upstairs," he said.

Long before the introduction of the English custom of regarding a wife's apartment as a sort of inner sanctuary, a Flamande's room had been impenetrable. This is due to no ostentation of virtue on the part of the good housewives; it springs from a habit of mind acquired in early childhood, a household superstition which looks on a bedroom as a delicious sanctuary, where there should be an atmosphere of gentle thoughts and feelings, where simplicity is combined with all the sweetest and most sacred associations of social life.

Any woman in Mme. Claes' position would have done her best to surround herself with dainty belongings; but Mme. Claes had brought a refined taste to the task, and a knowledge of the subtle influence which externals exert upon our moods. What would have been luxury for a pretty woman was for her a necessity. "It is in one's own power to be a pretty woman," so another Josephine had said; but there had been something artificial in the grace of the wife of the First Consul, who had never lost sight of her maxim for a moment; Mme. Claes had understood its import, and was always simple and natural.

Familiar as the sight of his wife's room was to Balthazar, he was usually so unmindful of the things about him that a thrill of pleasure went through him, as if he saw it now for the first time. The vivid colors of the tulips, carefully arranged in the tall, slender porcelain jars, seemed to be part of the pageant of a woman's triumph, the blaze of the lights proclaimed it as joyously as a flourish of trumpets. The candlelight falling on the gridelin silken stuffs brought their pale tints into harmony with the brilliant surroundings, breaking the surface with dim golden gleams wherever it caught the

light, shining on the petals of the flowers till they glowed like heaped-up gems. And these preparations had been made for him ! It was all for him !

Josephine could have found no more eloquent way of telling him that he was the source of all her joys and sorrows. There was something deliciously soothing to the soul in this room, something that banished every thought of sadness, till nothing but the consciousness of perfect and serene happiness was left. The soft clinging perfume of the Oriental hangings filled the air without palling on the senses ; the very curtains, so carefully drawn, revealed a jealous anxiety to treasure the lowest word uttered there, to shut out everything beyond from the eyes of him whom she had won back.

Mme. Claes drew the tapestry hangings across the door that no sound might reach them from without. Then, as she stood for a moment wrapped in a loose dressing-gown with deep frills of lace at the throat, her beautiful hair, black and glossy as a raven's wing, making a setting for her face, Josephine glanced with a bright smile at her husband, who was sitting by the hearth. A witty woman, who at times grows beautiful when her soul passes into her face, can express irresistible hopes in her smile.

A woman's greatest charm consists in a constant appeal to a man's generosity, in a graceful admission of helplessness, which stimulates his pride and awakens his noblest feelings. Is there not a magical power in such a confession of weakness ? When the rings had slid noiselessly over the curtain-rod, she went towards her husband, laying her hand on a chair as though to find support, or to move more gracefully and dissemble her lameness. It was a mute request for help. Balthazar seemed lost in thought ; his eyes rested on the pale olive face against its dusky background with a sense of perfect satisfaction ; now he shook off his musings, sprang up, took his wife in his arms, and carried her to the sofa. This was exactly what she had intended.



"You promised," she said, taking his hands, which thrilled at her touch, "to let me into the secret of your researches. You must admit, dear, that I am worthy of the confidence, for I have been brave enough to study a science which the church condemns, so that I may understand all that you say. But you must not hide anything from me; I am curious. And, first of all, tell me how it chanced that one morning you looked so troubled when I had left you so happy the evening before?"

"You are dressed too coquettishly to talk about chemistry."

"No, dear, to learn a secret which will let me a little further into your heart; is not that the greatest of all joys for me? All the sweetness of life is comprised, and has its source, in a closer understanding between two souls. And now, when your love is wholly and solely mine, I want to know this tyrannous idea which drew you away from me for so long. Yes, I am more jealous of a thought than all the women in the world. Love is vast, but love is not infinite; and in science there are unfathomable depths; I cannot let you go forth into them alone. I hate everything that can come between us; some day the fame that you are seeking so eagerly will be yours, and I shall be miserable. Fame would give you intense pleasure, would it not? and I alone should be the source of your pleasures, monsieur."

"No, dear angel, it was not a thought that set me on this glorious quest; it was a man."

"A man!" she cried aghast.

"Do you remember the Polish officer, Pepita, who spent a night here in our house in 1809?"

"Do I remember him? I am vexed with myself because I see his face so often—his bald head, the curling ends of his mustache, his sharp worn features, and those eyes of his, like flickering fires lit in hell, shining out of the coal-black hollows under his brows! There was something appalling in his listless, mechanical way of walking! If all the inns had

not been full, he certainly should never have spent the night here!"

"Well, that Polish gentleman was a M. Adam de Wierzchownia," answered Balthazar. "That evening, when you left us sitting in the parlor by ourselves, we fell somehow to talking about chemistry. He had been forced to relinquish his studies from poverty, and had become a soldier. If I remember rightly, it was over a glass of *cau sucrée* that we recognized each other as adepts. When I told Mulquinier to bring the sugar in lumps and not in powder, the captain gave a start of surprise.

"Have you ever studied chemistry?" he asked.

"Yes, with Lavoisier," I told him.

"You are very lucky," he exclaimed; "you are rich, you are your own master——"

"He gave one of those groans that reveal a hell of misery hidden and locked away in a man's heart or brain, a sigh of suppressed and helpless rage of which words cannot give any idea, and completed his sentence with a glance that made me shudder. After a pause he told me that, since what might be called the death of Poland, he had taken refuge in Sweden, and there had sought consolation in the study of chemistry, which had always had an irresistible attraction for him.

"Well," he added, "I see that you have recognized, as I have, that if gum arabic, sugar, and starch are reduced to a fine powder, they are almost indistinguishable, and, if analyzed, yield the same ultimate result."

"There was a second pause. He eyed me keenly for a while, then he spoke confidentially and in a low voice. To-day only the recollection of the general sense of those solemn words remains with me; but there was something so earnest in his tones, such fierce energy in his gestures, that every word seemed to vibrate through me, to be beaten into my brain with hammer-strokes. These, in brief, were his reasonings; for me they were like the coal which the seraphim laid

on the lips of the Prophet Isaiah, for after my studies with Lavoisier I could understand all that they meant.

“‘The ultimate identity of these three substances, to all appearances so different,’ he went on, ‘suggested the idea that all natural productions might be reduced to a single element. The investigations of modern chemistry have proved that this law holds good to a large extent. Chemistry classifies all creation under two distinct headings—organic nature and inorganic nature. Organic nature comprises every animal or vegetable growth, every organic structure however elementary, or, to speak more accurately, everything which possesses more or less capacity of motion, which is the measure of its sentient powers. Organic nature is therefore the most important part of our world. Now, analysis has reduced all the products of organic nature to four elements, three of which are gases—nitrogen, oxygen, and hydrogen; and the fourth, carbon, is a non-metallic solid.

“‘Inorganic nature, on the other hand—with so little diversity among its forms, with no power of movement or of sentience, destitute, perhaps, of the power of growth, conceded to it on insufficient grounds by Linnæus—inorganic nature numbers fifty-three simple bodies, and all its products are formed by their various combinations. Is it likely that the constituents should be most numerous when the results are so slightly various? My old master used to hold that there was a single element common to all these fifty-three bodies, and that some unknown force, no longer exerted, brought about the apparent modifications; this unknown force, in his opinion, the human intellect might discover and apply once more. Well, then, imagine that force discovered and once more set in motion, chemistry would be the science of a single element.

“‘Organic and inorganic nature are probably alike based upon four elements; but if we should succeed in decomposing nitrogen, for instance, which we may look upon as a negation,

their number would be reduced to three. We are on the very verge of the Grand Ternary of the ancients—we, who are wont to scoff, in our ignorance, at the alchemists of the middle ages! Modern chemistry has gone no further than this. It is much, and yet it is very little. Much has been accomplished, for chemistry has learned to shrink before no difficulties; little, because what has been accomplished is as nothing compared with what remains to do. 'Tis a fair science, yet she owes much to chance.

“There is the diamond, for instance, that crystallized drop of pure carbon, the very last substance, one would think, that man could create. The alchemists themselves, the chemists of the middle ages, who thought that gold could be resolved into its different elements, and made up again from them, would have shrunk in dismay from the attempt to make the diamond. Yet we have discovered its nature and the law of its crystallization.

“‘As for me,’ he added, ‘I have gone farther yet! I have learned from an experiment I once made, that the mysterious Ternary, which has filled men’s imaginations from time immemorial, will never be discovered by any analytical process, for analysis tends in no one special direction. But, in the first place, I will describe the experiment. You take seeds of cress (selecting a single one from among the many substances of organic nature), and sow them in flowers of sulphur, which is a simple inorganic body. Water the seeds with distilled water, to make certain that no unknown element mingles with the products of germination. Under these conditions the seeds will sprout and grow, drawing all their nourishment from elements ascertained by analysis. From time to time cut the cress and burn it, until you have collected a sufficient quantity of ash for your analysis; and what does it yield? Silica, alumina, calcic phosphate and carbonate, magnesian carbonate, potassic sulphate and carbonate, and ferric oxide; just as if the cress had sprung up in

the earth by the waterside. Yet none of these substances are present in the soil in which the cresses grew; sulphur is a simple body, the composition of distilled water is definitely known; none of them exist in the seeds themselves. We can only suppose that there is one element common to the cress and its environment; that the air, the distilled water, the flowers of sulphur, and the various substances detected by an analysis of the calcined cress (that is to say, the potassium, lime, magnesia, alumina, and so forth) are all various forms of one common element, which is free in the atmosphere, and that the sun has been the active agent.

“‘There can be no cavil at this experiment,’ he exclaimed, ‘and thence I deduce the existence of the Absolute! One element common to all substances, modified by a unique force—that is stating the problem of the Absolute in its simplest form, a problem which the human intellect can solve, or so it seems to me.

“‘You are confronted at the outset by the mysterious Ternary, before which humanity has knelt in every age—*primitive matter*, the *agency*, and the *result*. Throughout all human experience you find the awful number “three,” in all religions, sciences, and laws. And there,’ he said, ‘war and poverty put an end to my researches!

“‘You are a pupil of Lavoisier’s; you are rich, and can spend your life as you will; I will share my guesses at truth with you, the results of the experiments which gave me glimpses of the end to which research should be directed. The *primitive element* must be an element common to oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon; the *agency* must be the common principle of positive and negative electricity. If after inventing and applying test upon test you can establish these two theories beyond a doubt, you will be in possession of the “first cause,” the key to all the phenomena of nature.

“‘Oh! monsieur, when you carry *there*,’ he said, striking his forehead, ‘the last word of creation, a foreshadowing of

the Absolute, can you call it living to be dragged hither and thither over the earth, to be one among blind masses of men who hurl themselves upon each other at a given signal without knowing why? My waking life is an inverted dream. My body comes and goes, does this and that, amid men and cannon, goes under fire, and marches across Europe at the bidding of a power which I despise; and I have no consciousness of it all. My inmost soul is rapt in the contemplation of one fixed idea, engrossed by one all-absorbing thought—the Quest of the Absolute; to detect the force that is seen at work when a few seeds, which cannot be told one from another, set under the same conditions, will spring up and blossom, and some flowers will be white and some will be yellow. You can see its mysterious operation in insects, by feeding silkworms, apparently alike in structure, on the same leaves, and some will spin a white, others a yellow cocoon; you can see it in man himself when his own children bear no resemblance to their father or mother. Hence, may we not logically infer that there is one cause underlying these effects, beneath all the phenomena of nature? Is it not in conformity with all our thoughts of God to imagine that He has brought everything to pass by the simplest means and in the simplest manner?

“The followers of Pythagoras of old adored the one whence issued the many (their expression for the *primitive element*); men have revered the number “two,” the first aggregation and type of all that follow; and in every age and creed the number “three” has represented God (that is to say, *matter, force, and result*); through all these confused gropings of the human mind there is a dim perception of the Absolute! Stahl and Becher, Paracelsus and Agrippa, all great seekers of occult causes, had for password *Trismegistus*—that is to say, the Grand Ternary. Ignorant people, who echo and re-echo the old condemnations of alchemy, that transcendental chemistry, have doubtless no suspicion that

our discoveries justify the impassioned researches of those forgotten great men !

“ ‘Even when the secret of the Absolute is found, the problem of *movement* remains to be grappled with. Ah me ! while shot and shell are my daily fare, while I am commanding men to fling away their lives for nothing, my old master is making discovery on discovery, soaring higher and faster towards the Absolute. And I ? I shall die, like a dog, in the corner of a battery ! ’——

“ As soon as the poor great man had grown somewhat calmer, he said in a brotherly fashion that touched me——

“ ‘If I should think of any experiment worth making, I will leave it to you before I die.’

“ My Pepita,” said Balthazar, pressing his wife’s hand, “ tears of rage and despair coursed down his hollow cheeks as he spoke, and his words kindled a fire in me. Somewhat in this way Lavoisier had reasoned before, but Lavoisier had not the courage of his opinions——”

“ Indeed ! ” cried Mine. Claes, interrupting, in spite of herself, “ then it was this man who only spent one night under our roof that robbed us all of your affection ; one phrase, one single word of his has ruined our children’s happiness and our own ? Oh ! dear Balthazar, did he make the sign of the cross ? Did you look at him closely ? Only the Tempter could have those yellow eyes, blazing with the fire of Prometheus. Yes. Only the devil himself could have snatched you away from me ; ever since that day you have been neither father nor husband nor head of the household——”

“ What ! ” exclaimed Balthazar, springing to his feet, and looking searchingly at his wife, “ do you blame your husband for rising above other men, that he may spread the divine purple of glory beneath your feet ? a poor tribute compared with the treasures of your heart. Why, do you know what I have achieved in these three years ? I have made giant strides, my Pepita ! ” he cried, in his enthusiasm.

It seemed to his wife at that moment that the glow of inspiration lighted up his face as love had never done, and her tears flowed as she listened.

"I have combined chlorine and nitrogen; I have decomposed several substances hitherto believed to be elements; I have discovered new metals. Nay," he said, as he looked at his weeping wife, "I have decomposed tears. Tears are composed of a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucus and water."

He went on speaking without seeing that Josephine's face was drawn and distorted with pain; he had mounted the winged steed of science, and was far from the actual world.

"That analysis, dear, is one of the strongest proofs of the theory of the Absolute. All life, of course, implies combustion; the duration of life varies as the fire burns rapidly or slowly. The existence of the mineral is prolonged indefinitely, for in minerals combustion is potential, latent, or imperceptible. In the case of many plants this waste is so constantly repaired through the agency of moisture, that their life seems to be practically endless; there are living vegetable growths which have been in existence since the last cataclysm. But when, for some unknown end, nature makes a more delicate and perfect piece of mechanism, endowing it with sentience, instinct, or intelligence (which mark three successive stages of organic development), the combustion of vitality in such organisms varies directly with the amount performed.

"Man, representing the highest point of intelligence, is a piece of mechanism which possesses the faculty of thought, one-half of creative power. And combustion is accordingly more intense in man than in any other animal organism; its effects may be in a measure traced by the presence of phosphates, sulphates, and carbonates in the system, which are revealed by analysis. What are these substances but traces of the action of electric fluid, the life-giving principle? Should we not look to find the compounds produced by electricity in greater va-



riety in man than in any other animal? Was it not to be expected that man would possess greater facilities for absorbing large quantities of the absolute element, greater powers for assimilating it, an organization more perfectly adapted for converting it to his own uses, for drawing from it his physical force and his mental power? I am sure of it. Man is a matraass. In my opinion the idiot's brain contains less phosphorus, less of all the products of electro-magnetism, which are redundant in the madman; they are present in small quantities in the ordinary brain, and are found in their right proportion in the brain of the man of genius. The porter, the dancer, the universal lover, and the glutton misdirect the force stored up in their systems through the agency of electricity. Indeed, our sentiments——"

"That is enough, Balthazar! You terrify me; these are blasphemies. What! my love for you is——"

"Matter etherealized, and given off," answered Claes, "the secret doubtless of the Absolute. Only think of it! If I should be the first—I the first—if I find it out—if I find——if I find——!"

The words fell from him in three different tones of voice; his face gradually underwent a change; he looked like a man inspired.

"I will make metals, I will make diamonds; all that nature does I will do."

"Will you be any happier?" cried Josephine, in her despair. "Accursed science! Accursed fiend! You are forgetting, Claes, that this is the sin of pride by which Satan fell. You are encroaching on God!"

"Oh! Oh!"

"He denies God!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Claes, God wields a power which will never be yours."

At this slight on his beloved science Claes looked at his wife, and a quiver seemed to pass through him.

"What force?" he said.

"The one sole force—*movement*. That is what I have gathered from the books I have read for your sake. You can analyze flowers, or fruit, or Malaga wine, and of course discover their exact chemical composition, and find elements in them which apparently are not to be found in the surroundings, as with that cress you spoke of; possibly by dint of effort you could collect those elements together, but would you make flowers, or fruit, or Malaga wine from them? Could you reproduce the mysterious action of the sun? of the Spanish climate? Decomposition is one thing, creation is another."

"If I should discover the compelling force, I could create."

"Nothing will stop him!" cried Pepita, with despair in her voice. "Oh! my love, love is slain. I have lost love——"

She burst into sobs, and through her tears her eyes seemed more beautiful than ever for the sorrow, and pity, and love that shone in them.

"Yes," she said, sobbing, "you are dead to everything else. I see it all. Science is stronger in you than you yourself; you have soared too far and too high; you can never drop to earth again to be the companion of a poor woman. What happiness could I give you now? Ah! I tried to believe that God had made you to show forth His works and to sing His praises; that this irresistible and tyrannous power had been set in your heart by God's own hand. It was a melancholy consolation. But, no. God is good; He would have left a little room in your heart for the wife who idolizes you, and the children over whom you should watch. The devil only could enable you to walk alone among those bottomless pits; in darkness, lighted not by faith in heaven, but by a hideous belief in your own powers! Otherwise, you would have seen, dear, that you had run through nine hundred thousand francs in three years. Ah! do me justice, my God on earth! I do not murmur at anything you do. If we had only each other,

I would pour out both our fortunes at your feet ; I would pray you to take it and fling it in your furnace, and laugh to see it vanish in curling smoke. Then, if we were poor, I should not be ashamed to beg, so that you might have coal for your furnace fire. Oh ! more than that, I would joyfully fling myself into it, if that would help you to find your execrable Absolute, since it seems that all your happiness and hopes are bound up in that unsolved riddle. But there are our children, Claes ; what will become of our children if you do not find out this hellish secret very soon ? Do you know why Pierquin came this evening ? It was to ask for thirty thousand francs, a debt which we cannot pay. Your estates are yours no longer. I told him that you had the thirty thousand francs, to spare the awkwardness of answering the question he was certain to ask ; and it has occurred to me that we might raise the money by selling our old-fashioned silver."

She saw the tears about to gather in her husband's eyes, flung herself at his feet, and raised her clasped hands imploringly in despair.

"Dearest," she cried, "if you cannot give up your studies, leave them for a little until we can save money enough for you to resume them again. Oh ! I do not condemn them ! To please you, I would blow your furnace fires ; but do not drag our children down to poverty and want. You cannot love them surely any more ; science has eaten away your heart, but you owe it to them to leave their lives unclouded, you must not leave them to a life of wretchedness. I have not loved them enough. I have often wished that I had borne no children, that so our souls might be knit more closely together, that I might share your inner life ! And now, to stifle the pangs of my remorse, I must plead my children's cause before my own."

Her hair had come unbound, and fell over her shoulders ; all the thoughts that crowded up within her seemed to flash like arrows from her eyes. She triumphed over her rival.

Balthazar caught her in his arms, laid her on the sofa, and sat at her feet.

"And is it I who have caused your grief?" he said, speaking like a man awakened from a painful dream.

"Poor Claes, if you hurt us, it was in spite of yourself," she said, passing her hand through his hair. "Come, sit here beside me," she added, pointing to a place on the sofa. "There! I have forgotten all about it, now that we have you again. It is nothing, dear, we shall retrieve all our losses; but you will not wander so far from your wife again? Promise me that you will not. My great, handsome Claes. You must let me exercise over that noble heart of yours the woman's influence that artists and great men need to soothe them in failure and disappointment. You must let me cross you sometimes, for your own good. I will never abuse the power, and you may answer sharply and grumble at me. Yes, you shall be famous, but you must be happy too! Do not put chemistry first. Listen! we will not ask too much; we will let science share your heart with us, but you must deal fairly, and our half of your heart must be really ours! Now, tell me, is not my unselfishness sublime?"

She drew a smile from Balthazar. With a woman's wonderful tact, she had changed the solemn tone of their talk, and brought the burning question into the domains of jest, a woman's own domain. But even with the laughter on her lips, something seemed to clutch tightly at her heart, and her pulse scarcely throbbed as evenly and gently as usual; but when she saw revived in Balthazar's eyes the expression which used to thrill her with delight and exultation, and knew that none of her old power was lost, she smiled again at him as she said—

"Believe me, Balthazar, nature made us to feel; and though you will have it that we are nothing but an electrical mechanism, your gases and etherealized matter will never account for our power of foreseeing the future."

"Yes," he answered, "by means of affinities. The power of vision which makes the poet and the deductive power of the man of science are both based on visible affinities, though they are impalpable and imponderable, so that ordinary minds look on them as moral phenomena, but in reality they are purely physical. Every dreamer of dreams sees and draws deductions from what he sees. Unluckily, such affinities as these are too rare, and the indications are too slight to be submitted to analysis and observation."

"And this," she said, coming closer for a kiss, to put chemistry, which had returned so inopportunately at her question, to flight again, "is this to be an affinity?"

"No, a combination; two substances which have the same *sign* produce no chemical action."

"Hush! hush!" she said, "if you do not wish me to die of sorrow. Yes, dear, to see my rival always before me, even in the ecstasy of love, is more than I can bear."

"But, my dear heart, you are always in every thought of mine; my work is to make our name famous, you are the undercurrent of it all."

"Let us see; look into my eyes!"

Excitement had brought back all the beauty of youth to her face, and her husband saw nothing but her face above a mist of lace and muslin. "Yes, I did very wrong to neglect you for science. And, Pepita, when I fall to musing again, as I shall do, you must rouse me; I wish it."

Her eyes fell, and she let him take her hand, her greatest beauty, a hand that was at once strong and delicately shaped.

"But I am not satisfied yet," she said.

"You are so enchantingly lovely, that you can ask and have anything."

"I want to wreck your laboratory and bind this science of yours in chains," she said, fire flashing from her eyes.

"Well, then, the devil take chemistry!" earnestly exclaimed Balthazar.

"All my grief is blotted out at this moment," she said; "after this, inflict any pain on me."

Tears came to Balthazar's eyes at the words.

"You are right," he said; "I only saw you through a veil, as it were, and I could no longer hear you, it had come to that——"

"If I had been alone," she said, "I could have borne it in silence; I would not have raised my voice, my sovereign; but there were your sons to think of, Claes. Be sure of this, that if you had dissipated all your fortune, even for a glorious end, your great motives would have weighed for nothing with the world, your children would have suffered for what the world would call your extravagance. It should be sufficient, should it not, for your far-seeing mind, if your wife calls your attention to a danger which you had not noticed? Let us talk no more about it," she added, smiling at him, with a bright light dancing in her eyes. "Let us not be only half-happy this evening, Claes."

On the morrow of this crisis in the fortunes of the household, Balthazar Claes never went near his laboratory, and spent the day in his wife's society. Doubtless at Josephine's instance he had promised to relinquish his experiments. On the following day the family went to spend two months in the country, only returning to town to make preparations for the ball that had always been given in former years on the anniversary of their marriage.

Balthazar's affairs had become greatly involved, partly through debts, partly through neglect; every day brought fresh proof of this. His wife never added to his annoyance by reproaches; on the contrary, she did her utmost to meet and smooth over their embarrassments. There had been seven servants in their household on the occasion of their last "At Home," only three of them now remained—Le Mulquinier, Josette the cook, and an old waiting-maid, Martha by name, who had been with her mistress ever since Mme.

Claes had left the convent. With so limited a retinue it was impossible to receive the aristocracy of Douai; but Mme. Claes, who was equal to the emergency, suggested that a chef should be sent for from Paris, that their gardener's son should be pressed into their service, and that they should borrow Pierquin's man. Nothing betrayed the straits that they were in.

During the three weeks of preparation Mme. Claes kept her husband so cleverly employed that he did not miss his old occupations. She commissioned him to choose the flowers and exotic plants for the decoration of the staircase, the rooms, and the gallery; at another time she sent him to Dunkirk to procure some of the huge fish, without which a Netherland banquet would be shorn of all its glory. A fête given by the Claes was a very important function, demanding a prodigious amount of forethought and a heavy correspondence; for in the Low Countries, where family traditions of hospitality are sedulously maintained, for masters and servants alike, a successful dinner is a triumph scored at the expense of the guests.

Oysters arrived from Ostend, fruit was sent for from Paris, and grouse from Scotland, no detail was neglected, the Maison Claes was to entertain on the old lavish scale. Moreover, the ball at the Maison Claes was a well-known social event with which the winter season opened in Douai, and Douai at that time was the chief town of the department. For fifteen years, therefore, it had behooved Balthazar to distinguish himself on this occasion; and so well had he acquitted himself as a host, that the ball was talked of for twenty leagues round. The toilets, the invitations sent out, and any novelty that appeared even in the smallest details, were discussed all over the department.

This bustle of preparation left Claes little time for meditation on the Quest of the Absolute. His thoughts had been turned into other channels, old domestic instincts revived the dormant pride of the Fleming, the householder awoke, and

the man of science flung himself heart and soul into the task of astonishing the town. He determined that some new refinement of art should give this evening a character of its own; and of all the whims of extravagance he chose the fairest, the costliest, and most fleeting, filling his house with scented thickets of rare plants, and preparing bouquets for the ladies. Everything was in keeping with this unprecedented luxury; it seemed as if nothing that could ensure success were lacking.

But the 29th Bulletin, bearing the particulars of the rout of the Grand Army and of the terrible passage of the Beresina, reached Douai that afternoon. The news made a deep and gloomy impression on the Douaisians, and out of patriotism every one declined to dance.

Among the letters that reached Douai from Poland, there was one for Balthazar. It was from M. de Wierzchownia, who was at that moment in Dresden, dying of the wounds received in a recent engagement. Several ideas had occurred to him, he said, since they had spoken together of the Quest of the Absolute, and these ideas he desired to leave as a legacy to his host of three years ago. After reading the letter Claes fell into deep musings, which did honor to his patriotism; but his wife knew better, she saw that a second and deeper shadow had fallen over her festival. The glory of the Maison Claes seemed dimmed, as it were, by its approaching eclipse; there was a feeling of gloom in the atmosphere in spite of the magnificence, in spite of the display of all the treasures of bric-à-brac collected by six generations of amateurs, and now beheld for the last time by the admiring eyes of the Douaisians.

The queen of the evening was Marguerite, who made her first appearance in society. All eyes were turned on her, partly because of her fresh simplicity and the innocent frankness of her expression, partly because the young girl seemed almost like a part of the old house. With the soft rounded contour of her face, the chestnut hair parted in the middle, and smoothed down on either side of her brow, clear hazel



eyes, pretty rounded arms and plump yet slender form, she might have stepped out of the canvas of one of the old Flemish pictures on the wall. You could read indications of a firm will in the broad high forehead, gentle, shy, and sedate as she seemed; and though there was nothing sad or languid about her, there was but little girlish gleefulness in her face. Thoughtfulness there was, and thrift, and a sense of duty, all Flemish characteristics; and, on a second glance, there was a certain charm and softness of outline and a meek pride which atoned for a lack of animation, and gave promise of domestic happiness. By some freak of nature, which physiologists as yet cannot explain, she bore no likeness to either father or mother, but she was the living image of her maternal great-grandmother, a Conyncks of Bruges, whose portrait had been religiously preserved, and bore witness to the resemblance.

Supper gave some life to the ball. If the disasters that had befallen the Grand Army forbade the relaxation of dancing, no one apparently felt that the prohibition need apply to the pleasures of the table. Good patriots, however, left early, and only a few indifferent spirits remained, with some few card-players, and the intimate friends of the family. Little by little silence fell on the brilliantly-lighted house, to which all Douai had been wont to flock, and by one o'clock in the morning the gallery was empty, the candles were extinguished in one salon after another, and the courtyard itself, so lately full of noises and lights, had settled down into its wonted darkness and gloom. It was like a foreshadowing of the future.

As soon as the Claes returned to their rooms, Balthazar gave his wife the Polish officer's letter to read; she gave it back to him mournfully, she foresaw the end.

From that day forth the tedium of his life began visibly to weigh on Balthazar's spirits. In the morning, after breakfast, he used to play with little Jean for a while in the parlor, and talked with the two girls, who were busy with their sewing, or

embroidery, or lace-work ; but he soon wearied of the play and of the talk, and everything seemed to be a set task. When his wife came down, having changed her wrapper for a morning dress, he was still sitting in the low chair, gazing blankly at Marguerite and Félicie ; the rattle of their bobbins apparently did not disturb him. When the newspaper came, he read it deliberately through, like a retired tradesman at a loss how to kill time. Then he would rise to his feet, look at the sky for a while through the window panes, listlessly mend the fire, and sit down again in his chair, as if the tyrannous ideas within him had deprived him of all consciousness of his movements.

Mme. Claes keenly regretted her defective education and lack of memory. It was difficult for her to sustain an interesting conversation ; perhaps it is always difficult for two persons who have said everything to each other to find anything new to talk of unless they look for it among indifferent topics. The life of the heart has its moments, and wants contrasts ; the practical questions of daily life are soon disposed of by energetic minds accustomed to make prompt decisions, and social frivolity is unendurable to two souls who love. Such souls, thus isolated, who know each other thoroughly, should seek their enjoyments in the highest regions of thought, for it is impossible to set something little against something that is vast. Moreover, when a man has dwelt for long on great subjects, he is not easy to amuse, unless there is something of the child in his nature, the power of flinging himself into the present moment, the simple fresh-heartedness that makes men of great genius such charming children ; but is not this youthfulness of heart rare indeed among those who have set themselves to see and know and understand all things ?

During those months Mme. Claes tried all the expedients which love or necessity could suggest ; she even learned to play backgammon, a game that had always presented insuperable difficulties to her mind ; she tried to interest Balthazar

in the girls' education, consulting him about their studies, planning courses of lessons; but all these resources came to an end at last, and Josephine and Balthazar were in somewhat the same position as Mme. de Maintenon and Louis XIV. But Mme. de Maintenon could bring the pomps of power to her aid; she had wily courtiers who lent themselves to her comedies, playing their parts as ambassadors from Siam, and envoys from the Grand Sophi, to divert a weary king; and Louis XIV., after draining the wealth of France, had known what it was to be reduced to a younger brother's shifts for raising money; he had outlived youth and success, and had come to know old age and failure, and, in spite of his grandeur, to a piteous sense of his own helplessness; and she, the royal nurse, who had soothed his children, was not always able to soothe their father, who had squandered wealth and power and human lives, who had given his life for vanity and set God at nought, and was now paying the penalty of it all. But Claes was not suffering from exhaustion, but from unemployed energy.

One overwhelming thought possessed him. He was dreaming of the glories of science, of adding to the knowledge of the world, of fame that might have been his. He was suffering as a struggling artist suffers, like Samson bound to the pillars of the temple of the Philistines. So the result was much the same for the two sovereigns, though the intellectual monarch was suffering through his strength, and the other through his weakness.

What could Pepita do, unaided, for this kind of scientific nostalgia? At first she tried every means that family life afforded her, then she called society to the rescue, and gave two "cafés" every week. Cafés had recently superseded "teas" in Douai. At these functions the guests sipped the delicious wines and liqueurs with which the cellars always overflow, drank their *café noir* (black coffee) or *café au lait frappé* (coffee with whipped cream) and partook of various Flemish

delicacies ; while the women sang ballads, discussed each other's toilets, and retailed all the gossip of the town. It is just as it was in the time of Mieris or Terburg, always the same pictures, but some of the details are altered ; the drooping scarlet feathers and gray high-crowned hats are wanting, and you miss the guitars and the picturesque costumes of the sixteenth century.

Balthazar made strenuous efforts to act his part as master of the house, but his constrained courtesy and forced animation left him in a state of languor, which showed but too plainly what inroads the malady had made, and these dissipations were powerless to alleviate the symptoms. Balthazar, on the brink of the precipice, might catch at branch after branch, but the fall, though delayed, was so much the heavier. He never spoke of his old occupations, he never uttered regrets, knowing that it was quite impossible to continue his work, but his voice and movements were languid, his vitality seemed to be at a low ebb. This depression could be seen even in the listless way in which he would take up the tongs, and build fantastic pyramids with the glowing coals.

It was a visible relief when the evening was over ; sleep perhaps delivered him for a while from the importunities of thought ; but with the morning came the thought that another day must be lived through, and he counted the hours of consciousness as an exhausted traveler might reckon out the leagues of desert that lie between him and his journey's end.

If Mme. Claes knew the causes of this weariness, she tried to shut her eyes to its effects ; she would not see the havoc that it wrought. But though she might steel herself against the sight of his mental distress, his kindness of heart left her helpless. When Balthazar listened to Jean's laughter or the girls' chatter, and seemed all the while to hear an inner thought more plainly than his children's voices, Mme. Claes did not dare to ask him what that thought was ; but when she saw him shake off his sadness, and try to seem cheerful, that

he might not cast a gloom over others, his generosity made her falter in her purpose. His romps with little Jean and playful talk with the two little girls brought a flood of tears to poor Josephine's eyes, and she had to hurry from the room to hide her feelings; her heroism was costing her dear, it was breaking her heart. There were times when Mme. Claes longed to say, "Kill me, and do as you like!"

Little by little the fire seemed to die out of Balthazar's eyes, and the dull bluish hues of age crept over them. Everything seemed to be done with an effort; there was a dull hopelessness in the tones of his voice and in his manner even towards his wife. Towards the end of April things had grown so much worse that Mme. Claes took alarm. She had blamed herself bitterly and incessantly for having exacted this promise, while she admired the Flemish faith and loyalty with which it was kept. One day when Balthazar looked more depressed than ever, she hesitated no longer; she would sacrifice everything if so he might live.

"I give you back your word, dear," she said.

Balthazar looked at her in amazement; for the moment he could hardly comprehend her meaning.

"You are thinking of your experiments, are you not?" she went on.

He answered with a terrible readiness, by a gesture, but Mme. Claes had no thought of reproach; she had had time to sound the depths of the abyss into which they were both about to plunge together. She took his hand in hers and pressed it as she smiled at him.

"Thank you, dearest," she said, "I am sure of my power; you have given up what was dearer than life for my sake. Now it is my turn to give up. I have sold a good many of my diamonds, but there are some left, and with those that my brother gave me we could raise money enough for you to continue your experiments. I thought I would keep the jewels for our two girls, but your fame will more than make up for

the sparkling stones, and, besides, you will give them finer diamonds some day."

The sudden flash of joy over her husband's face was like a death-knell to Josephine's last hopes, and she saw with anguish that his passion was stronger than himself. Claes had a belief which enabled him to walk without faltering in a path which in his wife's eyes led by the brink of a precipice. He had this faith to sustain him, but to her who had no faith fell the heavier share of the burden; does not a woman always suffer for two? At this moment she chose to believe in his success, seeking thus to excuse herself for her share in the certain wreck of their fortunes.

"The love of my whole life would never repay your devotion, Pepita," said Claes, deeply moved.

He had scarcely spoken the words before Marguerite and Félicie came into the room to wish their father and mother good-morning. Mme. Claes looked down; for a moment she felt almost guilty before the two children; she felt that she had sacrificed their future to a wild delusion; but her husband took them on his knees and talked and laughed with them, because the joy he felt craved expression. Thenceforth Mme. Claes shared in her husband's life of enthusiasm. Science itself and desire of fame was everything to Claes; she not only sympathized with his aims, but all her hopes of her children's future were now bound up in his pursuits. Yet when her director the Abbé de Solis had sold her diamonds for her in Paris, when packages began to arrive from the firm of manufacturing chemists, all the unhappy wife's peace of mind deserted her. It was as if the restless malevolent spirit that possessed her husband tormented her also, and she lived in constant and disquieting expectation. It was she who now sometimes sat like one dead all day long in her low chair, unable to act or to think from the very vehemence of her wishes. Balthazar was at work the while in his laboratory, but she had no outlet for her energies; the pent-up forces of

her nature harassed her soul as doubts and fears. Sometimes she blamed herself for weakly humoring a passion which she felt convinced was hopeless; she would remember M. de Solis's censure, and rise from her chair and walk to the window, and look up at the laboratory chimney with dismay and dread. If a curl of smoke went up from it, she would watch it rise in despair, and conflicting ideas strove within her until her brain reeled. Her children's future was vanishing in that smoke, but she was saving their father's life. Was it not her first duty to make him happy? This last thought would bring peace for a little space.

She had the freedom of the laboratory now, and might stay there as long as she pleased, but even this melancholy satisfaction had to be given up. It was too painful to see Balthazar so absorbed in his work that he did not even notice her presence; sometimes, too, she felt that she was actually in the way; the pangs of jealousy became intolerable, every little unintentional neglect was a deadly wound, a wild desire would seize her that the house might be blown up, and so put an end to it all. She made a barometer, therefore, of old Le Mulquinier. When she heard him whistle as he came and went, or laid the table for breakfast and dinner, she augured that her husband's experiments had turned out well; that there was some hope of success in the near future; but if Le Mulquinier was sad or sulky, she turned sad, wistful eyes on him: was Balthazar also depressed? A sort of tacit understanding was established between them at last, in spite of the proud reserve of the mistress and the surly independence of the manservant.

She had no resource in herself, no power of throwing off the thoughts that depressed her; she experienced to the full every crisis of hope or despair; the load of anxiety for the husband and the children that she loved weighed more and more heavily on the trembling wife and mother. She scarcely noticed how dreary the house was, or the silence and gloom that once had chilled her heart as she sat in the parlor all day

long ; she had grown silent too, and forgot to smile. She brought up her two daughters to be good housewives ; with a mother's sad foresight, she tried to teach them various branches of womanly skill against the day when they might come face to face with poverty. But beneath the monotonous surface of existence the pulses of life beat painfully. By the end of the summer Balthazar had not only spent all the money which the old Abbé de Solis had raised by selling the diamonds in Paris, but he was in debt—he owed some twenty thousand francs to Protez and Chiffreville.

In August, 1813, about a year after the day of the opening scene of this story, Claes was no nearer the end in view, though he had made several interesting discoveries, for which, unluckily, he cared not at all. The day which saw his programme completely carried out found him overwhelmed with a sense of failure. The thought of the vast sums of money which had been spent, and all to no purpose, drove him to despair. It was a wretched ending to his hopes. He left his garret, came slowly down into the parlor where the children were, sank into one of the low chairs, and sat there for a while like one dead, paying no heed to the questions with which his wife plied him. He escaped upstairs that he might have no witness to his grief. Josephine followed him, and brought him into her room ; and there, alone with her, Balthazar gave way to his despair. In the man's tears, in the broken words that bore witness to the artist's discouragement, in the remorse of the father, there was something so wild and incoherent, so dreadful, so touching, that Mme. Claes, watching him, felt an anguish that she had never known before. The victim comforted the executioner.

When Balthazar said with horrible earnestness, "I am a scoundrel ; I am risking our children's lives and yours ; I ought to kill myself, it would be a good thing for you all," the words cut her to the heart. She knew her husband so well that she was in terror lest he should act at once on this



horrible suggestion; and one of those revulsions of feeling that stir life to its depths swept over her, a revulsion all the more dangerous because Pepita allowed no sign of agitation to appear, and tried to be calm and dispassionate.

"This time I have not consulted Pierquin, dear," she said; "he may be friendly, but he would not be above feeling a secret satisfaction if we were ruined, so I have taken the advice of an old man who has a father's kindness for us. My confessor, the Abbé de Solis, suggested a way of averting ruin at any rate. He came to see your pictures; and he thinks that if we sell those in the gallery we could pay off all the mortgages as well as your debts to Protez and Chiffreville, for I expect there is something owing to them."

Claes bent his head as a sign of assent; already his hair had grown white.

"M. de Solis knows the Happes and the Duncckers of Amsterdam," she went on; "they have a mania for buying pictures, their money was only made yesterday; and as they know that such works of art are only to be found in old family collections, they will only be too glad to give their full value for the paintings. Even when our estates are clear, there will still be something left over, for the pictures will bring in at least a hundred thousand ducats, and then you can go on with your work. We need very little, the two girls and I; we will be very careful; and in time we will save money enough to fill the empty frames again with other pictures, and in the meantime you shall be happy."

Balthazar raised his face to his wife's; he felt half-doubtful, half-relieved. They had exchanged rôles. The wife had become the protecting power; and he, in spite of the sympathy of hearts between them, held Josephine in his arms, and did not feel that she was convulsed with anguish, did not see how the tresses of her hair were shaken by the throbbing of her heart, nor notice the nervous quivering of her lips.

"I have not dared to tell you," he cried, "that I am

scarcely separated from the Absolute by a hair's-breadth. I have only to discover a means of submitting metals to intense heat in a vessel where the pressure of the atmosphere is nil—in short, in a perfect vacuum—and I shall volatilize them."

Mme. Claes almost broke down, the egoistic answer was too much for her. She had expected passionate gratitude for her devotion, and she received—a problem in chemistry. She left her husband abruptly, went downstairs into the parlor, sank into her low chair again, and burst into tears. Her two daughters, Marguerite and Félicie, each took one of her hands in theirs, and knelt on either side of her, wondering at her grief.

"What is it mother?" they asked her again and again.

"Poor children! I am dying; I feel that I have not long to live."

Marguerite shuddered as she looked at her mother's face, and for the first time noticed a ghastly pallor beneath the dark olive hue of the skin.

"Martha! Martha!" called Félicie. "Come here, mamma wants you."

The old waiting-woman came running from the kitchen. When she saw the livid color that had replaced the dusky brown-red tints in her mistress' face—

"Body of Christ!" she cried in Spanish, "madame is dying!"

She hurried away to bid Josette heat some water for a foot-bath for her mistress, and then returned.

"Don't frighten the master, Martha; say nothing about it," said Mme. Claes. "Poor dear girls!" she added convulsively, clasping Marguerite and Félicie to her heart. "If I could only live long enough to see you both happy and married. Martha," she went on, "tell Le Mulquinier to go to M. de Solis and ask him to come to see me."

The thunderbolt that struck down the mistress of the house naturally brought dismay in the kitchen. Josette and Martha,

old and devoted servants, were so deeply attached to Mme. Claes and her two daughters that the blow was as heavy as it was unexpected. The terrible words: "Madame is dying, monsieur must have killed her! Be quick and get ready a mustard bath!" had drawn sundry ejaculations from Josette, who hurled them at Le Mulquinier. Le Mulquinier, calm and phlegmatic as ever, was eating his breakfast at a corner of the table, underneath one of the windows which looked out on the yard. The whole kitchen was as spick and span as the daintiest boudoir.

"I knew how it would end," remarked Josette, looking straight at the valet as she spoke. She had climbed on to a stool to reach down a copper kettle which shone like burnished gold. "What mother could look on and see her children's father amusing himself by frittering away a fortune, like the master does, and everything flying away in smoke."

Josette's countenance, framed in its frilled cap, was not unlike the round wooden nut-crackers that Germans carve; she gave Le Mulquinier a sharp glance out of her little bloodshot eyes, which was almost venomous. For all answer the old valet gave a shrug worthy of a sorely-tried Mirabeau, and opened his cavernous mouth, but only to put a piece of bread and butter, accompanied by a morsel of red herring, into it.

"If madame would let monsieur have some money," he said at length, "instead of bothering him, we should all be swimming in gold very soon! There is not the thickness of a farthing between us and the——"

"Well, then, you, with your twenty thousand francs of savings, why don't you hand them over to the master? He is your master, and since you put such faith in his sayings and doings——"

"You know nothing about them, Josette. Just mind your pots and pans, and boil the water," said the Fleming, interrupting the cook.

"I know what I know; I know that we once had several

thousand ounces of silver plate here, and you have melted it down, you and your master between you; and we shall very soon have only six halfpennies left out of five pence," sharply retorted Josette.

"And the master," put in Martha, "will kill madame, and get rid of a wife who holds him back, and will not let him eat everything up. He is possessed, that is quite plain. You are risking your soul at the least, Le Mulquinier, if you have one, that is, for you are just like a block of ice, when all the rest of us are in such trouble. The young ladies are crying like Magdalens. Be quick and go for M. de Solis!"

"I have the master's orders to set the laboratory straight," said the valet. "It is too far from here to the Quartier d'Esquerchin. Go yourself."

"Just listen to the brute!" said Martha. "Who is to give madame her foot-bath? Is she to be left to die, with the blood gone to her head?"

"Mulquinier!" said Marguerite from the dining-room, which was next to the kitchen, "when you have left the message for M. de Solis, go and ask Dr. Pierquin to come at once."

"Hein! you will have to go!" said Josette.

"Mademoiselle, monsieur told me to clear out the laboratory," answered Le Mulquinier, turning triumphantly to the two women-servants.

M. Claes came down the stairs at this moment, and Marguerite spoke to him. "Father, can you spare us Mulquinier to go on an errand into the town?"

"There, you miserable old heathen, you will have to go now!" said Martha, as she heard M. Claes answer in the affirmative.

The lack of good-will and devotion to the family on the valet's part was a sore point; the two women and Le Mulquinier were always bickering, and his indifference increased their loyal affection. This apparently paltry quarrel was to bring

about great results in future days when the family stood in need of help in misfortune.

Once more Balthazar became so absorbed that he did not notice how ill his wife was. He gave little Jean a ride on his knee, but his thoughts were all the while with the problem which he might hope once more to solve. He saw the water brought for his wife's foot-bath, for she had not strength to leave the parlor, or the low chair into which she had sunk. He watched the two girls as they busied themselves about their mother, and did not try to account for their anxiety and care of her. Mme. Claes laid her fingers on her lips if Marguerite or Jean seemed about to speak. A scene of this nature was certain to make a young girl think; and Marguerite, standing between her father and mother, was old enough and sensible enough to understand what it meant. She realized that her father was most directly concerned in her mother's troubles.

A time always comes in the history of every family when the children begin consciously or unconsciously to judge their parents. Mme. Claes felt that this critical time had come; that the girl of sixteen, with her strong sense of justice, would see what would appear to her to be her father's faults very plainly, and Mme. Claes set herself to justify his conduct. The profound respect which she showed for him at this moment, the way in which she effaced herself for fear of disturbing his meditations, left a deep impression on her children's minds; they looked on their father with something like awe. But in spite of the infectious nature of this devotion, Marguerite could not help recognizing it, and her admiration increased for the mother to whom she was bound so closely by every incident of daily life. The young girl's affection had deepened ever since she had dimly divined her mother's troubles and had pondered over them; no human power could have kept the knowledge of them from Marguerite; a word heedlessly let fall by Josette or Martha had enlightened her as to their cause. In spite of Mme. Claes' reserve, her

daughter had unraveled thread by thread the mystery of this household tragedy.

In time to come Marguerite would be her mother's active helper and confidante, and, perhaps, in the end a formidable judge. Mme. Claes watched Marguerite anxiously, and tried to fill her heart with her own devotion; she saw the young girl's firmness and sound judgment, and shuddered to think of possible strife between father and daughter when she should be no more, and Marguerite had taken her place. Poor woman! she dreaded the consequences of her death far more than death itself. The resolution she had just taken had been prompted by forethought for Balthazar. By freeing her husband's estate from all liabilities, she left it independent, and forestalled all future disputes by separating his interests from those of her children; she hoped to see him happy until her eyes were closed, and when that day came, Marguerite would be the guardian angel who watched over the family. She hoped to leave her tenderness in Marguerite's heart, and so, from beyond the grave, her love should still shine upon those so dear to her. Yet she shrank from lowering Claes in Marguerite's eyes, and would not impart her misgivings and fears until the inevitable moment came; she watched Marguerite more closely than ever, wondering whether of her own accord the young girl would be a mother to her brothers and sister, and a gentle and tender helpmeet to her father.

So Mme. Claes' last days were embittered by fears and sad forebodings of which she could speak to no one. She felt that her deathblow had been dealt her in that last fatal scene, and her thoughts turned to the future; while Balthazar, now totally unfitted for the cares of property and the interests of domestic life, thought of nothing but the Absolute. The deep silence in the parlor was only broken by the monotonous beating of Balthazar's foot; he did not notice that little Jean had wearied of his ride, and climbed down from his father's knee. Marguerite, sitting beside her mother, looked at her

white, sorrowful face, and then glanced from time to time at her father, and wondered why he showed no feeling. Presently the street door shut to with a clang that echoed through the house, and the family saw the old Abbé de Solis slowly crossing the court leaning on his nephew's arm.

"Oh ! here is M. Emmanuel," cried Félicie.

"Good boy !" murmured Mme. Claes, as she saw Emmanuel de Solis ; "I am glad to see him again."

Marguerite's face flushed at her mother's praise. Only two days ago the sight of the Abbé's nephew had stirred mysterious feelings in her heart and awakened thoughts that had hitherto lain dormant. Only two days ago her mother's confessor had come to see the pictures in the gallery, and one of those small events that pass unheeded, and alter the whole course of a life, had then taken place ; for this reason a brief sketch of the two visitors must be given here.

Mme. Claes made it a rule of conduct to perform the duties of her religion in private. Her director, who now entered the house for the second time, was scarcely known by sight to its inmates ; but it was impossible to see the uncle and nephew together without feeling touched and reverent, and their visit had left the same impression on every one.

The Abbé de Solis was an old man of eighty, with silver hair ; all the ebbing life in the feeble, wasted face seemed to linger in the eyes. He walked with difficulty, for one of his shrunken legs terminated in a painfully deformed foot encased in a velvet wrapping, so that he always needed the support of a crutch or of his nephew's arm. Yet when you saw the bent figure and emaciated frame, you felt that an iron will sustained that fragile and suffering body, and that a pure and religious soul dwelt within it. The Spanish priest, distinguished for his vast learning, his knowledge of the world, and his sincere piety, had been successively a Dominican friar, cardinal-penitentiary of Toledo, and vicar-general of the archbishopric of Mechlin. The influence of the house of Casa-Real would

have made him one of the highest dignitaries of the church ; but even if the French Revolution had not put an end to his ecclesiastical career, grief for the death of the young Duke, whose governor he had been, had led him to retire from active life, and to devote himself entirely to the education of a nephew, who had been left an orphan at a very early age.

After the French conquest of the Netherlands he had settled in Douai to be near Mme. Claes. In his youth he had felt an enthusiastic reverence for Saint Theresa, and had always decided leanings towards the more mystical side of Christianity. There have always been Illuminists and Quietists in Flanders ; Mlle. Bourignon made most of her converts among the Flemings ; and the old Abbé de Solis found a little flock of Catholics in Douai, who still clung, undeterred by papal censure, to the doctrines of Fénelon and Mme. Guyon, and was the more glad to stay among them because they looked on him as a father in the faith. His morals were austere, his life had been exemplary ; it was said that he had the gift of trance, and had seen visions. But the stern ascetic was not utterly divorced from the things of this life ; his affection for his nephew was a link that bound him to the world, and he was thrifty for Emmanuel's sake. He laid his flock under contribution for a work of charity before having recourse to his own purse ; and he was so widely known and respected for his disinterestedness, his perspicacity was so seldom at fault, that every one was ready to answer his appeals. To give some idea of the contrast between uncle and nephew, the older man might be compared to a hollow willow by the waterside, and the younger to a briar-rose climbing about the old lichen-covered tree, and covering it with graceful garlands, which seem to support it.

Emmanuel had been rigidly brought up. His uncle hardly allowed him to go out of his sight ; no damsel was ever more jealously guarded by her mother ; and Emmanuel was almost morbidly conscientious and innocently romantic. Souls that



draw all their force from religion retain the bloom of youth that is rubbed off so soon, and the old priest had checked the development of pleasure-loving instincts in his pupil; constant study and an almost monastic discipline had been his preparation for the battle of life. Such a bringing up, which launched Emmanuel into the world with all his youthful freshness of heart, might make his happiness if his affections were rightly placed at the outset, and had endowed him with an angelic purity which invested him with something of the charm of a young girl. The gentle eyes veiled a brave and fearless soul; there was a light in them that thrilled other souls, as the sound given out by crystal vibrates on the ear. His face was eloquent, yet his features were regular; no one could fail to be struck by their flawless delicacy of outline, and by the expression of repose which comes from inward peace. His fair complexion seemed still more brilliant by force of contrast with his dark eyes and hair. Everything about him was in harmony; his voice did not disappoint the expectations raised by so beautiful a face, and his almost feminine grace of movement and clear, soft gaze were in keeping with his voice. He did not seem to be aware that his half-melancholy reserve, his self-repression, his respectful and tender solicitude for his uncle, excited interest in him; but no one who had seen the two together—the younger man carefully adapting himself to the old Abbé's tottering gait, heedfully looking ahead for the smoothest path, and avoiding any obstacle over which the elder might stumble, could fail to recognize in Emmanuel those generous qualities of heart and brain that make man so noble a creature.

Emmanuel's real greatness showed itself in his love for his uncle, who could do no wrong in his eyes, to whom he rendered an unquestioning obedience; some prophetic instinct, surely, had suggested the gracious name given to him at the font. If in private or abroad the old Abbé exerted the stern and arbitrary authority of a Dominican father, Em-





SLIGHTLY, WITH A SWAN LIKE MOVEMENT OF HER  
HEAD, SHE GLANCED AT EMMANUEL.



manuel would sometimes raise his head in such noble protest—with a gesture which seemed to say if another man had ventured to oppose him, he would have shown his spirit—that gentle natures were touched by it, as painters are moved by the sight of a great work of art; for a beautiful thought has the same power to stir our souls, whether it is revealed in a living human form, or made real for us by the power of art.

Emmanuel had come with his uncle to see the pictures in the *Maison Claes*; and Marguerite, having learned from Martha that the Abbé de Solis was in the picture gallery, found some slight pretext for speaking to her mother, so that she might see the great man of whom she had heard so much. She had gone thither unthinkingly, hiding her little stratagem under the careless manner by which young girls so effectually conceal their real thoughts, and by the side of the old man dressed in black, with his deathly pallor and bent and stooping frame, she had seen Emmanuel's young and beautiful face. The two young creatures had gazed at each other with the same childlike wonder in their eyes; Emmanuel and Marguerite must surely have met each other before in their dreams. Their eyes fell at once, and met again with the same unconscious avowal.

Marguerite took her mother's arm and spoke to her in a low voice to keep up the pretence of her errand; and from under shelter of her mother's wing, as it were, she turned, with a swanlike movement of her throat, to glance once more at Emmanuel, who still stood supporting his uncle.

The windows of the gallery had been distributed so that all the light should fall on the pictures, and the dimness of the shadows favored the stolen glances which are the delight of timid souls. Neither of them had, of course, advanced even in thought as far as the *if* with which passion begins; but both of them felt that their hearts were stirred with a vague trouble which youth keeps to itself, shrinking perhaps from disclosing the secret, or wishing to linger over its sweetness.

The first impression which calls forth the long-dormant emotion of youth is nearly always followed by a mute wonder such as children feel when, for the first time, they hear music. Some children laugh at first, and then grow thoughtful; others listen gravely for a while, and then begin to laugh; but there are souls who are destined to live for poetry or love, and they listen long, with a mute request to hear the music again; their eyes are lighted up with pleasure, or with a dawning sense of wonder at the Infinite. If we are always bound with all the force of early association to the spot where we first understood the beauty and mystery of sound; if we remember the musician and even the instrument with delight, how can we help loving the other soul that for the first time reveals the music of life to us? Does not the heart from which we draw our first breath of love become, as it were, our native country? Emmanuel and Marguerite were each for each that musical voice which awakens a sleeping sense; it was as if a hand had withdrawn the veil of cloud and pointed out to them the distant shore bathed in a noonday blaze of light.

When Mme. Claes made the Abbé pause for a moment before the picture of an angel by Guido, Marguerite leaned forward a little to see what Emmanuel thought of it, and Emmanuel glanced at Marguerite, comparing the mute thought shadowed forth on the painter's canvas with the thought revealed in the girl who stood there in life before him. She felt and understood the unconscious and delicious flattery. The old Abbé gravely praised the beautiful composition, and Mme. Claes replied; the young people were silent.

The mysterious dusk of the gallery, the quiet that brooded over the house, the presence of their elders, all the circumstances of their meeting, served to stamp it on the memory, and to deepen the vague outlines of a shadowy dream. All the confused thoughts that fell like rain in Marguerite's soul seemed to have spread themselves out like a wide, clear sea, which was lighted up by a ray of light when Emmanuel stam-

mered out a few words as he took leave of Mme. Claes. The young rich voice exerted a mysterious spell over her heart; the revelation was complete; it only rested with Emmanuel whether it should bear fruit for him; for the man who first awakens love in a girl's heart is often an unconscious instrument of fate, and leaves his work unfinished. Marguerite bowed in confusion; her good-bye was a glance that seemed to express her regret at losing this pure and charming vision. Like the child, she wanted to hear her music once again.

The leave-taking took place at the foot of the old staircase, before the parlor door, and from the parlor window she watched the uncle and nephew cross the court, and followed them with her eyes until the street door closed on them. Mme. Claes had been so deeply engrossed with the weighty matters which her director had come to discuss, that she had not thought of watching her daughter's face; and on the occasion of this second visit she was again full of such terrible trouble that she did not see in the red flush on Marguerite's face the indications of happiness and the workings of a girlish heart.

By the time the old Abbé was announced Marguerite had taken up her work again, and apparently found it so interesting that she greeted the uncle and nephew without raising her eyes from it. M. Claes returned the Abbé de Solis' bow mechanically, and left the parlor as if his presence were demanded elsewhere. The venerable Dominican seated himself beside Mme. Claes with one of those keen glances by which he seemed to read the depths of souls; he had scarcely seen M. Claes and his wife before he guessed that some catastrophe had taken place.

"Go into the garden, children," said the mother. "Marguerite, take Emmanuel to see your father's tulips."

Marguerite, somewhat embarrassed, took Félicie's hand in hers and looked towards the visitor, who reddened and followed her out of the parlor, catching up little Jean to keep



himself in countenance. When all four of them were out in the garden, Jean and Félicie scampered off, and Marguerite, left alone with young M. de Solis, went towards the bed of tulips which Le Mulquinier always planted out in the same way, year after year.

"Are you fond of tulips?" Marguerite asked, as Emmanuel seemed unwilling to break the silence.

"They are magnificent, mademoiselle; but a love of tulips is an acquired taste. The flowers dazzle me; I expect that it is because I am so used to working in my dark little room beside my uncle; I like softer colors better."

He looked at Marguerite as he uttered these last words; but in that glance, full of confused longings, there was no suggestion that the quiet face before him, with its white velvet surface and soft color, was like a flower.

"Do you work very hard?" Marguerite asked Emmanuel as they went towards a green-painted garden seat. "You will not be so close to the tulips here," she added; "they will not be so tiring to your eyes. You are right, the colors are dazzling; they make one's eyes ache."

"Yes, I work hard," the young man answered after a short pause, spent in smoothing the gravel on the path with his foot. "I work at all sorts of things. My uncle intended to make a priest of me——"

"Oh!" Marguerite exclaimed naively.

"I objected; I felt that I had no vocation. But it took a great deal of courage to cross my uncle's wishes. He is so kind and so very fond of me. Quite lately he paid for a substitute to save me from the conscription, and I am only a poor orphan nephew——"

"Then what do you mean to do?" asked Marguerite, with a sudden gesture, which seemed as if she would fain take the words back again, for she added—

"Pardon me, monsieur; you must think me very inquisitive."

"Oh ! mademoiselle, nobody but my uncle has ever asked me the question," said Emmanuel, looking at her admiringly and gratefully. "I am to be a schoolmaster. There is no help for it ; I am not rich, you see. If I can obtain a head-mastership in some school in Flanders, I shall have enough to live upon. I shall marry some woman who will be content with very little, and whom I shall love. That is the sort of life that is in prospect for me. Perhaps that is why I would rather have a moon-daisy from the fields about Orchies, a flower that no one looks at, than these glowing tulips, all purple and golden and emerald and sapphire. The tulips seem to me a sort of symbol of a brilliant and luxurious life, just as the moon-daisy is like a quiet, old-fashioned life, a poor school-master's life such as mine will be."

"Until now, I have always called the moon-daisies marguerites," said she.

Emmanuel de Solis flushed up to the eyes ; he racked his brains for an answer, and tormented the gravel with his boots. So many things occurred to him, and were rejected as silly, that the pause grew embarrassing, and he was forced to say something. "I did not venture to pronounce your name——" he said at last, and got no further.

"A schoolmaster !" she went on.

"Oh ! I shall be a schoolmaster for the sake of a secure position, mademoiselle, but I want to do other things as well, something great that wants doing.—I should like some bit of historical research best."

"Oh !"

That "Oh," which seemed to cover the speaker's private reflections, added to the young man's embarrassment. He began to laugh foolishly, and said—

"You are making me talk about my own affairs, mademoiselle, when I should speak to you of yourself."

"I think my mother and your uncle must have finished their talk," she said, looking at the parlor windows,

"Your mother looked very much altered, I thought."

"She is in trouble, and says nothing to us about her troubles, and we can only feel sorry for her, that is all we can do."

As a matter of fact, Mme. Claes had just consulted the Abbé de Solis on a difficult case of conscience, which he alone could resolve. Ruin was clearly impending; and now that the pictures were about to be sold, she thought of keeping back a large part of the purchase money as a sort of reserve fund to secure her children against want. Balthazar took so little heed of his affairs that it would be easy to do this without his knowledge. After mature deliberation, and after taking all the facts of the case into consideration, the old Dominican had given his sanction to this prudent course. The conduct of the sale devolved on him, and the whole matter was arranged privately for fear of injuring M. Claes' credit.

The old Abbé sent his nephew to Amsterdam duly armed with letters of introduction; and the young man, delighted to have this opportunity of doing a service to the house of Claes, succeeded in selling the collection in the picture gallery to the celebrated bankers, Happe and Duncker, ostensibly for the sum of eighty thousand Dutch ducats, but fifteen thousand ducats were to be paid secretly over and above this amount to Mme. Claes. The pictures were so well known that a single letter from Balthazar accepting the proposals made by Messieurs Happe and Duncker completed the bargain. Emmanuel de Solis was commissioned to receive the price of the pictures, which he remitted by other than the ordinary channels, so that Douai might know nothing of the transaction which had just taken place.

By the end of September, Balthazar had paid his debts, cleared his liabilities, and was at work once more; but the glory of the Maison Claes had departed. Yet Balthazar was so blinded by his passion that he seemed to feel no regrets;

he was so confident that he could retrieve all his losses in a little while, that he had reserved the right to repurchase his pictures. And as for Josephine, in her eyes the paintings were as nothing compared with the happiness of her husband and children; she filled the blank spaces in the gallery with pictures from the state apartments, and rearranged the furniture in the rooms where the family sat, so that the empty spaces on the walls should not be noticed.

Balthazar had about two hundred thousand francs with which to begin his experiments afresh, his debts were all paid, and M. de Solis and his nephew became trustees for Mme. Claes' reserve fund, which was swelled somewhat further, for gold was at a premium in those days of European wars, and the Abbé de Solis sold the ducats, receiving for them sixty-six thousand francs in crowns, which were stored away in the Abbé's cellar.

For eight months Mme. Claes had the sad satisfaction of seeing her husband entirely engrossed in his work; but she never recovered from the shock received that August afternoon, and fell into a decline, from which there was no recovery. Science had Balthazar in its clutches; the disasters that befell the armies of France, the first fall of Napoleon, the return of the exiled Bourbons, all the events of those eventful years could not draw his attention from his studies; he was no longer a citizen, as he had ceased to be a husband and a father. He was a chemist.

Towards the end of the year 1814 the wasting disease that had attacked Mme. Claes had made such progress that she could not leave her bed. She would not drag out this slow death in her own room where she had lived in her happier days, it was too full of memories, and she could not help drawing comparisons between the present and the past, which overwhelmed her with despair, so she lay downstairs in the parlor. The doctors had humored the desire of her heart, pronouncing the room to be more airy, cheerful, and conven-

ient than her own apartment; her bed had been placed between the chimney-piece and the window, so that she could look out into the garden. The last days of her life were spent in perfecting her work on earth, implanting in her daughters' hearts the passionate devotion of her own. She could no longer show her love for her husband, but she was free to lavish her affection on her daughters, and the charm of this life of close communion between mother and daughters was all the sweeter because it had begun so late.

The little scruples of a too sensitive affection weighed upon her, as upon all generous natures, like remorse. Her children had not always known, she thought, the love which was their due, and she tried to atone for all these imaginary wrongs; they felt her exquisite tenderness in her constant thought and care for them. She would fain have sheltered them in her heart, and nestled them beneath her failing wings, given them in one day the love that they should have had in those days when she had neglected them. Her soul was full of remorse, which gave a fervent warmth to her words and caresses; her eyes dwelt fondly on her children before the kind tones of her voice thrilled their hearts; her hand seemed always to be stretched out in benediction.

The hospitality of the Maison Claes had come to an end after the first splendid effort; Balthazar never gave another ball on the anniversary of his marriage, and saw no visitors; the house was quieter than ever, but this occasioned no surprise in Douai, for Mme. Claes' illness was a sufficient reason in itself for the change. The debts had been paid, and this had put a stop to gossip, and during the foreign occupation of Flanders and the war of the Hundred Days the chemist was completely forgotten. For two years Douai was almost in a state of siege, occupied in turn by French troops or foreign soldiers; it became a city of refuge for all nationalities and for peasants obliged to fly from the open country; people lived in fear for their property, and even in terror of

their lives, and in such a time of calamity and anxiety no one had a thought to spare for others. The Abbé de Solis and his nephew, and the two Pierquins, were Mme. Claes' only visitors.

The winter of 1814-1815 was a long and most painful agony for her. Her husband seldom came to see her. He sat with her after dinner, it is true, for a few hours; but she had not sufficient strength now to keep up a long conversation; and when he had repeated two or three remarks, which he never varied, he sat beside her without speaking, and the dismal silence in the parlor was unbroken. The only breaks in this dreary monotony were the evenings when the Abbé de Solis and his nephew came to the Maison Claes. The old Abbé played backgammon with Balthazar; while Marguerite, seated at her mother's bedside, talked with Emmanuel. Mine. Claes smiled on their innocent happiness, and would not let them see how sweet and how painful it was to her aching heart to feel the fresh breath of the dawn of love in the words that they let fall. The tones of the two young voices, so full of charm for the lovers, almost broke her heart; she surprised a glance of comprehension exchanged between them, and memories of her youth and the happy past brought her thoughts to the present, and she felt all its bitterness to the full as she lay there like one already dead. Emmanuel and Marguerite instinctively divined her sufferings, and delicacy of feeling led them to check the sweet playfulness of love lest it should add to her pain.

No one as yet seems to have discovered that our sentiments have a life of their own, and take their character from the circumstances which gave them birth; the places in which they gathered strength, the thoughts that filled our minds at the time, influence their development and leave their impress upon them. There is a love like that of Mme. Claes, passionate in its beginnings, and passionate to the end; there is a love, on which everything else smiles from the outset, that never loses

the glad freshness of its morning, and reaps its harvest of happiness amid laughter and rejoicing; but there is also a love early enveloped in sadness or surrounded by misfortune, its pleasures are painful and dearly-bought, snatched amid fears, embittered by remorse, or clogged with despair. This love in the depths of their hearts, which neither Marguerite nor Emmanuel recognized as yet, this feeling that had been awakened in a moment of stillness and silence beneath the dusky roof of the picture gallery, in the presence of the austere old Abbé, was tinged with something of the sober twilight hues of its earliest surroundings; it was grave and reticent, but full of subtle shades of sweetness, and furtive joys over which they lingered in secret as over stolen grapes snatched in some vineyard nook.

Beside this bed of pain they never dared to give expression to their thoughts, and all unconsciously their emotion gathered strength because it was repressed in the depths of their hearts, and only revealed itself in their care for the invalid. It seemed to Emmanuel that this drew them more closely together, and that he was already a son to Marguerite's mother; though instead of the sweet language of lovers he received only sad, grateful thanks from Marguerite. Their sighs of happiness as they exchanged glances were scarcely distinguishable from the sighs drawn from them by the sight of the mother's suffering; their brief moments of felicity, implied confessions, and unspoken promises, moments when their hearts went out towards each other, stood out, like the "Allegories" painted by Raphael, against a dark background. Each felt a trust and confidence in the other though no words had been said; they felt that the sun still shone, though heavy dark clouds had gathered overhead, and they knew not what wind would scatter them; the future seemed doubtful, perhaps trouble would dog them all their lives, so they sat timidly among the gloomy shadows without daring to ask, "Shall we finish the day together?"

Yet, beneath the tenderness that Mme. Claes showed for her children, there lay concealed other thoughts to which she nobly refused to listen. Her children never caused her apprehensions and terror; they were her comfort, but they were not her life; she lived for them, but she was dying for Balthazar. Painful though it might be for her to have her husband by her side, absent in thought for whole hours, to receive an unseeing glance from time to time, yet she was unconscious of her suffering so long as he was with her. Balthazar's indifference to his dying wife would have seemed unpardonable to any stranger who chanced to witness it, but Mme. Claes and her daughters were so used to it, and understood him so well, that they forgave him.

If Mme. Claes had some dangerous seizure in the course of the day, if she felt worse or seemed to be at the point of death, Claes was the one person in the house, or indeed in the whole town, who did not know that the wife who had once been so passionately loved was in danger. Le Mulquinier knew it, but Félicie and Marguerite had been forbidden by their mother to speak to Claes of her illness.

Mme. Claes was happy when she heard his footsteps in the picture gallery as he crossed it on his way to dinner; she was about to see him, she summoned all her strength to meet the coming joy. The color rushed to the pale face of the dying woman as he entered, she almost looked as she had been wont to do in health; the man of science came to her bedside and took her hand in his, and never saw her as she really was: for him alone she was always well. In reply to his, "How are you to-day, dear wife?" she would answer, "Better, dear!" and he in his preoccupied mood readily believed her when she spoke of getting up again, of being quite well to-morrow. He was so abstracted that he never saw that there was anything seriously wrong with his wife, and thought the disease of which she was dying was some passing ailment. Every one else knew that she was dying, but for him she was full of life.



This year saw the husband and wife completely severed. Claes slept in a distant room, lived in his laboratory or study from morning to night, and never saw Pepita save in the presence of his daughters and the few friends of the house who came to visit her. He had learned to do without her. The two who had once shared every thought drifted farther and farther apart; the moments of close communion, of rapture, of expansion, which are the life of the heart, came seldom and more seldom, and the rare moments of bliss ceased altogether. If physical suffering had not come to her aid and filled up the empty days, the anguish of her isolation might have killed Josephine, but she was dying. She was sometimes in such terrible pain that she was glad that he, whom she never ceased to love, was not there to be a witness of her sufferings. And for the part of the evening that Balthazar spent with her, she lay watching him, feeling that he was happy after his fashion, and this happiness which she had procured for him she made her own. This meagre satisfaction must suffice for her now; she no longer asked if she was beloved; she strove to believe it, and went softly, fearing that this thin sheet of ice should give way and her heart and all her hopes should be drowned in the dark depths that yawned beneath.

Nothing ever happened to break the monotony of the day; the disease that wasted Mme. Claes' strength perhaps contributed to the apparent peace, for her affection could only play a passive part, and weakness made it easier to wait and endure patiently. The year 1816 opened under these gloomy conditions.

In the last days of February came the sudden shock which brought the angelic woman, who, so the Abbé de Solis said, was almost sinless, to the grave. The blow came from Pierquin.

He watched for an opportunity when the two girls were sufficiently far away to whisper in her ear, "Madame, M. Claes has commissioned me to borrow three hundred thousand

francs on his estates ; you must take measures to secure your children's property."

Mme. Claes clasped her hands and raised her eyes. She thanked the notary by a kindly inclination of the head and by a sad smile, which touched Pierquin. The words were like the stab of a knife ; they killed Pepita. The rest of the day she spent with the painful thoughts that swelled her heart ; she felt like some traveler who has walked steadily and bravely along the dizzy brink of a precipice, till some pebble slips from under his feet, and, losing his balance, he at last falls headlong into the depths. As soon as the notary left the house, Mme. Claes asked Marguerite for writing materials, and summoned all her strength to write her final directions and requests. Many times she stopped and looked up at Marguerite ; the time for making her a confidant had come.

Marguerite had taken her mother's place as head of the household during this illness, and had more than realized the dying woman's hopes of her. Mme. Claes feared no longer for the family she was leaving under the care of this strong and loving guardian angel ; she should still live on in Marguerite. Both the women doubtless felt that there were sad secrets to be told ; whenever the mother glanced at Marguerite, the girl looked up at once, and the eyes of both were full of tears. Several times, as Mme. Claes laid down the pen, Marguerite had begun, "Mother?" and had broken off because her voice failed her ; and her mother, absorbed in her last thoughts, did not hear her entreaty. At last the letter was finished ; and Marguerite, who had held the taper while it was sealed, turned away to avoid seeing the direction.

"You can read it, my child !" the dying woman said, with a heartrending tone in her voice.

Marguerite watched her mother's fingers as she wrote, "For my daughter Marguerite."

"I will rest now," she added, putting the letter under her pillow, "and then we will talk."

She fell back on her pillows as if exhausted by the effort she had just made, and slept for several hours. When she awoke, all her children were kneeling around her in fervent prayer. It was a Thursday; Gabriel and Jean had just come home from school; Emmanuel de Solis—who for the past six months had been one of the masters there, teaching history and philosophy—had come with them.

"Dear children, we must bid each other farewell," she cried. "You are all with me to the last, and *adieu*—" She did not finish the sentence.

"M. Emmanuel," said Marguerite, who saw the deathly pallor of her mother's face, "will you tell our father that mamma is much worse?"

Young de Solis went up to the laboratory, and through Le Mulquinier's good offices saw Balthazar for a moment; the chemist heard the young man's urgent entreaties, and answered, "I am coming."

"My friend," Mme. Claes said when Emmanuel returned from this errand, "will you take my two boys away, and ask your uncle to come to me? I must take the last sacraments I think, and I should like to receive them from his hand."

When she was left once more with the two girls she made a sign which Marguerite understood. Félicie was sent away, and the mother and daughter were alone.

"I had something to say to you, mamma dear," said Marguerite, who did not realize how ill her mother was, and knew nothing of the shock which Pierquin's ill-advised revelation had given her. "I have been without money for house-keeping expenses these ten days past, and the servants' wages have not been paid for six months. I have twice made up my mind to ask papa for the money, and both times my courage failed. You do not know what has happened. All the wine in the cellar and the pictures in the gallery have already been sold——"

"He has not said a word about it to me!" cried Mme.

Claes. "God is taking me to Himself in time, but, oh! my poor children, what will become of you?"

She spent a few moments in fervent prayer; remorse seemed to glow in her eyes.

"Marguerite," she went on, drawing the sealed envelope from its hiding-place, "if, when I am dead, you should ever be brought to misery, that is to say, if you should want bread, then open this letter and read it. Marguerite dear, love your father, but take care of your sister and brothers. In a few days, perhaps in a few hours, you will be the head of the house! Be very careful; and, Marguerite, it may very likely happen that you will have to oppose your father's wishes; for he has spent large sums already on this effort to learn a secret which, if discovered, will make him famous and bring him enormous wealth, and he is sure to want money again; perhaps he will ask you for money; and then, while you must remember that you are the sole guardian of those whose interests are committed to your care, you must never forget what is due to your father, to a great man who is spending himself, his wealth, and his whole life in a task which will make his family illustrious, and you must give him all a daughter's tenderness. He would never wrong his children intentionally; he has such a noble heart; he is so good, so full of love for you; you, who are left, will see him a kind and affectionate father once more. These things must be said, Marguerite, now that I am on the brink of the grave. Promise me, my child, that you will fill my place, if you would make it easier for me to die; promise that you will never add to your father's troubles by a single reproach, that you will never judge him harshly! In short, you must be a gentle and indulgent mediator until your task is finished, until your father once more takes his place as head of the family."

"I understand, dearest mother," said Marguerite, as she kissed the dying woman's red eyelids. "I will do as you wish."

"And you must not marry, darling, until Gabriel is old enough to take your place," Mme. Claes went on. "If you were married, your husband very likely would not share your feelings; he might make trouble in the family, and harass your father."

Marguerite looked into her mother's eyes and said, "Have you no other counsels to give me with regard to my marriage?"

"Do you hesitate, dear child?" asked the dying mother in alarm.

"No," she answered; "I promise to obey you."

"Poor child!" said her mother, as she shed hot tears, "I could not bring myself to sacrifice myself for you, and now I am asking you to sacrifice yourself for them all. Happiness makes us selfish. Yes, Marguerite, I was weak, because I was happy. You must be strong; you must think for the rest, and so act that your brothers and your sister shall never reproach me. Love your father, and do not thwart him more than you can help."

Her head fell back on the pillow, her strength had failed her, she could not say another word. The struggle between the wife and the mother had exhausted her. A few moments later the Abbé de Solis and his assistants entered the parlor, and the servants crowded in. The Abbé's presence recalled Mme. Claes to herself, and as the rite began she looked about her, seeking Balthazar among the faces about her bed.

"Where is the master?" she asked in a piteous tone, which sent a thrill of horror through those assembled; her whole life and death seemed to be summed up in that cry. Martha hurried from the room, and, old as she was, ran up to the laboratory, and knocked loudly at the door.

"Monsieur," she cried, in angry indignation, "madame is dying! They are going to administer the sacraments, and are waiting for you."

"I am coming down directly," said Balthazar.

Le Mulquinier appeared a moment later, and said that his

master was about to follow. Mme. Claes never took her eyes from the door all through the ceremony, but it was over before Balthazar came. The Abbé de Solis and the children were standing beside the bed, a flush came over the dying woman's face at the sight of her husband, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"*Were you on the point of decomposing nitrogen?*" she asked with angelic sweetness, that sent a thrill through those about her.

"I have done it!" he cried triumphantly. "Nitrogen is partly composed of oxygen, partly of some imponderable substance which to all appearance is the essential principle of——"

He suddenly stopped, interrupted by a murmur of horror, which brought him to his senses.

"What was it that they told me?" he began. "Are you really worse?—What has happened?"

"This," said the Abbé de Solis indignantly in Balthazar's ear, "this—your wife is dying, and you have killed her!" and without waiting for an answer, the Abbé took Emmanuel's arm and left the room, the children went with him across the courtyard. Balthazar stood for a while as if thunderstruck; he gazed at his wife with tears in his eyes.

"You are dying, and I have killed you?" he cried. "What does he mean?"

"Dear," she answered, "your love was my life, and when all unconsciously you ceased to love me, my life ceased too."

The children had come back again; Claes sent them away, and sat down by his wife's pillow. "Have I ever ceased to love you for one single moment?" he asked, taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips.

"I have no reproaches to make, dearest. You have made me very happy, too happy indeed; for the contrast between the early days of our marriage, which were so full of joy, and these last years, when you have no longer been yourself, and

the days have been so empty, has been more than I could bear. Our inner life, like our physical life, has its vital springs. For the past six years you have been dead to love, to your family, to all that makes the happiness of life. I am not thinking of the joy and bliss which are the appanage of youth, and must cease with youth, but which leaves behind them the fruits on which the soul lives afterwards, an unbounded confidence and sweet established uses; you have deprived me of all these solaces of the after-time. Ah! well, it is time for me to go; this is not a life together in any sense; you have hidden your thoughts and your actions from me. How can you have come to feel afraid of me? Have I ever reproached you by gesture, or word, or deed? Well, and you have sold your remaining pictures, you have even sold the wine in the cellar, and you have begun to borrow money again on your property, without a word of all this to me! Oh, I am about to take leave of life, and I am sick of life! If you make mistakes, if in striving after the impossible you lose sight of everything else, have I not shown that there was enough love in my heart to find it sweet to share your errors, to be always by your side, even, if need be, in the paths of crime? You have loved me only too well, therein lies my glory and my misery. This illness began long ago, Balthazar; it dates from the day when you first made it clear to me, here in this room where I am about to die, that the claims of science were stronger than family ties. And now your wife is dying, and you have run through your fortune. Your fortune and your wife were your own to dispose of; but when I shall be no more, all my property will pass to your children, and you will not be able to touch it. What will become of you? I must tell you the truth, and dying eyes see far. Now that I am going, what will counter-balance this accursed passion, which is as strong in you as life itself? If I have been sacrificed to it, your children will count for very little; for, in justice to you, I must allow that I came first

with you. Two millions and six years of toil have been thrown into that bottomless pit, and you have discovered nothing——”

Claes' white head sank ; he hid his face with his hand.

“You will discover nothing but shame for yourself and misery for your children,” continued the dying woman. “Already they call you ‘Claes the alchemist ;’ a little later, and it will be ‘Claes the madman !’ As for me, I believe in you ; I know how great and learned you are ; I know that you have genius, but ordinary minds draw no distinction between genius and madness. Glory is the sun of the dead ; yours will be the fate of all greatness here on earth ; you will know no happiness as long as you live. I am going now ; I have had no joy of your fame, which would have consoled me for my lost happiness ; and so, to sweeten the bitterness of death, let me feel certain that my children's bread is secure, my dear Balthazar. Nothing can give me peace of mind, not even your——”

“I swear,” said Claes, “to——”

“No, dear, do not swear, lest you should fail to keep your word,” she said, interrupting him. “It was your duty to protect us, and for nearly seven years you have failed to do so. Science is your life. Great men should have neither wife nor children ; they should tread the paths of misery alone ; their virtues are not those of commonplace people ; such men as you belong to the whole world, not to one woman and a single family. You are like those great trees which exhaust the soil round about them, and I am the poor field-plant beside it that can never rear its head so high ; I must die before half your life is spent. I have waited till my last hour to tell you these horrible truths, which have been revealed to me in anguish and despair. Have pity on our children ! Again and again, until my last sigh, I entreat you to have pity on our children, that so my words may find an echo in your heart. This wife of yours is dying, you see. Slowly



and gradually she has starved for lack of affection and happiness. Alas ! but for the cruel kindness which you have involuntarily shown me, could I have lived so long ? But the poor children ! They have never failed me ; they have grown with the growth of my sorrows, and the mother has outlived the wife. Have pity, have pity on our children ! ”

“ Le Mulquinier ! ” Balthazar thundered.

The old servant hurried into the room.

“ Go up and break everything to pieces, all the machinery, and everything else. Be careful how you do it, but do it thoroughly ! I will have nothing more to do with science ! ” he said, turning to his wife.

“ It is too late, ” she said, with a glance at Le Mulquinier.

“ Marguerite ! ” she moaned, feeling that death was near. Marguerite stood in the doorway, and gave a sharp cry as she met her mother’s eyes and saw the ghastly pallor of her face.

“ Marguerite ! ” the dying woman cried again. This last word she ever spoke, uttered with a wild vehemence, seemed like a solemn summons to her daughter to take her place.

The rest of the family hurried in alarm to the bedside, in time to see her die. Mme. Claes’ life had ebbed away in the final effort she had made. Balthazar and Marguerite sat motionless, she at the head and he at the foot of the bed. The two who had best known her goodness and inexhaustible kindness could not believe that she was really dead. The glance exchanged between father and daughter was freighted with many thoughts ; she judged her father, and her father trembled already lest his daughter should be the instrument of vengeance. Memories crowded upon him, memories of the love that had filled his life, and of her whose last words seemed to carry an almost sacred authority which had so stamped them on his soul that it seemed as if he must forever hear them ringing in his ears ; but Balthazar mistrusted himself, he doubted whether he could resist the spirit which possessed him, he felt that the impulses of remorse had grown

weaker already at the first menaces of a return of his passion, and he was afraid of himself.

When Mme. Claes was gone, every one felt that she had been the life and soul of the Maison Claes, and that now that soul was no more. And the house itself, where her loss was felt to the full, the parlor where the noble Josephine still seemed to live was kept shut; nobody had the heart to enter it.

Society does not feel called upon to practice the virtues which it preaches to individuals; it offends hourly (though only in words) against its own canons; a jest prepares the way for base actions, a jest brings down anything beautiful or lofty to the ordinary level. If a son sheds too many tears for his father's loss, he is ridiculous; if too few, he is held up to execration; and then society, having said its say, diverts itself by weighing the dead, scarcely yet cold, in its balance.

On the evening of the day when Mme. Claes died her friends discussed her over their whist, dropped flowers on her tomb in a pause while the cards were dealing, and paid their tribute to her noble character while sorting hearts and spades.

Then, after the usual lugubrious commonplaces, which are a kind of preliminary vocal exercise in social lamentation, and which are uttered with the same intonations and exactly the same amount of feeling all over France at every hour of the day, the whole chorus proceeded to calculate the amount of Mme. Claes' property.

Pierquin opened the discussion by pointing out that the lamented lady's husband had made her life so wretched that death was a happy release for her, and that it was a still greater blessing for her children. She would never have had sufficient firmness to oppose the wishes of the husband whom she adored, but now her fortune had passed out of Claes' hands. One and all began forthwith to reckon the probable amount of poor Mme. Claes' fortune, to calculate her savings (had she, or had she not, managed to put anything by?), and made out inventories of her jewels, and ransacked her drawers and

her wardrobe, while her bereaved family were yet kneeling in prayer and tears by her bed of death.

With the experienced eye of a sworn valuer, Pierquin took in the situation at a glance. He was of the opinion that all Mme. Claes' property might be "got together again" (to use his own expression), and should amount to something like fifteen hundred thousand francs. A large part of this was represented by the forests of Waignies; that property had risen enormously in value in the last twelve years, and he made a rapid computation of the probable value of the trees of all ages from the oldest to the youngest. If that was not sufficient, Balthazar had probably enough to "cover" the children's claims. Mlle. Claes was, therefore, still, in his peculiar phraseology, a girl "worth four hundred thousand francs."

"But if she does not marry pretty soon," he added, "M. Claes will ruin his children; he is just the man to do it. If she were married she would be emancipated from her father's control, and could compel him to sell the forest of Waignies, to divide it among them, and to invest the shares of the minors in such a way that their father could not touch them."

Every one began to suggest the names of various young men of the province who might aspire to the hand of Mlle. Claes, but no one flattered the notary so far as to include him in the list. Pierquin raised so many objections to all the proposed suitors, and considered none of them worthy of Marguerite, that the company exchanged significant smiles, and amused themselves by teasing the notary, prolonging the process in provincial fashion. To Pierquin it seemed that Mme. Claes' death was likely to assist his cause, and he already began to cut up the dead for his own benefit.

"That good lady yonder," said he to himself, as he went home that night, "was as proud as a peacock; she would never have allowed me to marry a daughter of hers. Eh! eh! but if I play my cards well now, why should I not marry the girl? Old Claes has carbon on the brain, and does not

care what becomes of his children; if I ask him for his daughter, as soon as I have convinced Marguerite that she must marry for her brothers' and sister's sake, he will be glad enough to be rid of a girl who may give him a good deal of trouble."

He fell asleep in the midst of his meditations on the advantages of this match, so attractive to him on so many grounds, a marriage which bade fair to secure his complete happiness. It would have been hard to find a more delicately lovely or a better bred girl in the province. Marguerite was as modest and graceful as the fair flower which Emmanuel had not dared to mention before, lest he should reveal the secret wishes of his heart. She had religious principles and instinctive pride; his honor would be safe in her keeping. This marriage would not only gratify the vanity which enters more or less into every man's choice of a wife, but the notary's pride would be satisfied; an alliance with a twice-ennobled family, which bore one of the most distinguished names in Flanders, would reflect lustre upon him.

The very next morning Pierquin went to his strong box, and thence drew several notes of a thousand francs each, which he pressed on Balthazar, in order to spare his cousin any petty pecuniary annoyances in his grief. Balthazar would no doubt feel touched by the delicate attention, and speak of it to his daughter with an accompanying panegyric on the good qualities of the notary and his kindness of heart. But Balthazar did nothing of the kind. Neither M. Claes nor his daughter saw anything extraordinary in this action; they were so taken up with their grief that they scarcely gave a thought to Pierquin. Indeed, Balthazar's despair was so great that those who had been disposed to blame his previous conduct now relented and forgave him, not on the score of his devotion to science, but because of the tardy remorse which would never repair the evil. The world is quite satisfied with grimaces; it takes current coin without

inquiring too curiously whether or no the metal is base ; the sight of pain has a certain dramatic interest, it is a sort of enjoyment in consideration of which the world is prepared to pardon everything, even to a criminal. The world craves sensation so eagerly that it absolves with equal readiness those who move it to laughter or to tears, without demanding a strict account of the means employed in either case.

Marguerite had just completed her nineteenth year when her father intrusted the management of the household into her hands ; her brothers and sister remembered that their mother in the last moments of her life had bidden them obey their older sister, and her authority was dutifully recognized. Her delicate, pale face looked paler still by contrast with her mourning, as its sweet and patient expression was enhanced by sadness. From the very first it was abundantly evident that she possessed the womanly courage, the fortitude, and constant serenity which ministering angels surely bring to their task of healing, as they lay their green palm branches on aching hearts. But although she had early understood the duties laid upon her, and had accustomed herself to hide her sorrow, it was none the less deep ; and the serenity of her face was little in keeping with the vehemence of her grief. It was to be a part of her early experience to know the pain of repressing the sorrow and love with which the heart overflows ; henceforward the generous instincts of youth were to be curbed continually at the bidding of tyrannous necessity. After her mother's death she found herself involved at once in intricate problems where serious interests were at stake, and this at an age when a girl usually thinks of nothing but pleasure. The hard discipline of pain has never been lacking for angelic natures.

A love which has vanity and greed for its twin supporters is the most stubborn of passions. Pierquin meant to lose no time in surrounding the heiress. The family had scarcely put on mourning when he found an opportunity of speaking to

Marguerite; and began his operations with such skill, that she might well have been deceived by his tactics. But love had brought a faculty of clairvoyance, and Marguerite was not to be deceived, although Pierquin's good-nature, the good-nature of a notary who shows his affection by saving his client's money, gave some appearance of truth to his specious sentimentalities. The notary felt strong in his hazy relationship, in his acquaintance with family secrets and business affairs, in the esteem and friendship of Marguerite's father. The very abstractedness of that father, who was not likely to form any projects for his daughter's settlement in life, favored Pierquin's cause. He thought it quite impossible that Marguerite could have any predilection, and submitted his suit to her, though he was not clever enough to disguise beneath the flimsy veil of feigned passion the interested motives that had led him to scheme for this alliance, which are always hateful to young souls. In fact, they had changed places; the notary's revelation of selfishness was artless, and Marguerite was on her guard; for he thought that he had to do with a defenceless girl, and had no regard for the privileges of weakness.

"My dear cousin," he began, as he walked up and down the paths in the little garden, "you know my heart, and you know also how I shrink from intruding on your grief at such a moment. I ought not to be a notary, I am far too sensitive; I have such a feeling heart; but I am always forced to dwell on prosaic questions of interest when I would fain yield to the softer emotions which make life happy. It is very painful to me to be compelled to speak to you of matters which must jar upon your present feelings; but it cannot be helped. You have constantly been in my thoughts for the past few days. I have just discovered, by a curious chance, that your brothers' and your sister's fortunes, and even your own, are imperiled. It rests with you to save your family from utter ruin."

"What ought we to do?" she asked, somewhat alarmed at these remarks.

"You should marry," answered Pierquin.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she exclaimed.

"You will marry," returned the notary, "after mature reflection on the critical condition of your affairs."

"How can my marriage save us from——?"

"That was what I was waiting to hear, cousin," he broke in. "Marriage emancipates a girl."

"Why should I be emancipated?" asked Marguerite.

"To put you in possession of your rights, my dear little cousin," replied the notary, with an air of triumph. "In that event you would take your share of your mother's fortune; and before you can take your share her property must be liquidated, and that would mean a forced sale of the forest of Waignies. That once settled, all the capital would be realized, and your father would be bound, as guardian, to invest your sister's share and your brothers' in such a way that chemistry could not touch it."

"And suppose that none of these things happen—what then?" asked she.

"Why, in that case," said the notary, "your father would administer the estate. If he takes it into his head again to make gold, there is nothing to prevent him from selling the forest of Waignies, and leaving you all as bare as shorn lambs. The forest of Waignies is worth about fourteen hundred thousand francs at this moment, but your father may cut down every stick of timber any day, and the thirteen hundred acres of land will not fetch three hundred thousand francs. This is almost sure to happen; and would it not be wiser to prevent it by raising the question at once, by emancipating yourself and demanding your share of the inheritance? You would save in other ways; your father would not fell the timber as he otherwise would do from time to time, to your prejudice. Just now chemistry is dormant, and of course he would invest

the money realized by the sale in consols. The funds are at fifty-nine, so the dear children would have very nearly five thousand livres of interest on fifty thousand francs. Besides, as it is illegal to spend a minor's capital, your brothers and sister would find their fortune doubled by the time they came of age. Now, on the other hand, my word ! There you have the whole position ! Not only so, but your father has dipped pretty heavily into your mother's property ; and when the inventory is made out, we shall see what the deficit amounts to. If there is a balance owing, you can take a mortgage on his lands, and save something in that way."

"For shame !" said Marguerite ; "that would be an insult to my father. It is not so long since my mother's last words were uttered, that I should have forgotten them already. My father is incapable of robbing his children," she added, with bitter tears in her eyes. "You do not know him, M. Pierquin."

"But suppose, my dear cousin, that your father betakes himself to chemistry again——"

"We should be ruined, should we not ?"

"Oh ! utterly ruined ! Believe me, Marguerite," he said, taking her hand and pressing it to his heart ; "believe me, I should fail in my duty if I did not urge this course upon you. Your interests alone——"

"Monsieur," returned Marguerite coolly, as she withdrew her hand, "the real interests of my family demand that I should not marry. That was my mother's decision."

"Cousin !" he cried, with the conviction of a man of business who sees a fortune squandered, "you are rushing on to your own destruction ; you might as well fling your mother's money into the water. Well, for you I will show the devotion of the warm friendship I feel for you. You do not know how much I love you ; I have adored you ever since I saw you on the day of the last ball that your father gave. You were charming ! You may trust the voice of the heart when it speaks of your interests, dear Marguerite."



There was a moment's silence ; then he went on, " Yes, we will summon a family council, and emancipate you without consulting you about it."

" But what does ' emancipation ' mean ? "

" It means that you will come into possession of your rights."

" Then, if I can be emancipated in this way, why would you have me marry ? And to whom ? "

Pierquin did his best to look tenderly at his cousin, but the expression of his face was so at variance with the hard eyes that usually only grew eloquent over money, that Marguerite fancied she saw an interested motive in this affectionate impromptu.

" You should marry a man whom you cared for, in your own circle," he got out. " You must have a husband, if it were only to manage your business affairs. You will be left face to face with your father ; and can you hold your own against him, all by yourself ? "

" Yes, monsieur ; I shall find means to defend my brothers and sister when the time comes."

" Plague take the girl ! " thought Pierquin to himself. Aloud he said, " No ; you will never be able to stand out against him."

" Let us say no more about it," she replied.

" Good-bye, cousin. I shall do my best to serve you in spite of yourself ; I shall show you how much I love you by preventing a misfortune which every one in the town foresees."

" Thank you for the interest you take in me, but I beg of you neither to say nor do anything that can give my father the slightest annoyance."

Marguerite thoughtfully watched Pierquin's retreating figure, and could not help comparing his metallic voice, his manners, supple as steel springs, his glances, which expressed servility rather than gentleness, with the mute revelation of

Emmanuel's feelings towards her, which impressed her as music or poetry might.

In every word we speak, in every action of our lives, there is a strange magnetic power which makes itself felt, and which never deceives. The glances, the tones of the voice, the lover's impassioned gestures, can be imitated; a clever actor may perhaps deceive an inexperienced girl, but to be successful he should have the field to himself. If there is another soul which vibrates in unison with every feeling that stirs her own, will she not soon find out the difference between love and its semblance? Emmanuel at this moment, like Marguerite herself, was under the influence of the clouds which had gathered about them ever since that first meeting in the picture gallery; the blue heaven of love was hidden from their eyes. He had singled her out for a worship which, from its very hopelessness, was tender, mysterious, and reverent in its manifestations. Socially he was too far beneath Mlle. Claes to hope to be accepted as her husband; he was poor, and had nothing but a noble name to offer her. Then he had waited and waited for some slight encouragement, which Marguerite would not give him beneath the eyes of a dying mother.

Equally pure, they had not as yet spoken a word of love. Their joys had been the secret joys which unhappy souls must perforce linger over alone. The same hope had, indeed, thrilled them both, but they had trembled and remained apart; they seemed to fear themselves, conscious that each belonged too surely to the other. Emmanuel, therefore, feared to touch with his lips the hand of the sovereign lady whom he had enshrined in his heart. The slightest careless contact would have brought such an intoxication of delight that his senses would have been beyond his control; he would no longer have been master of himself. But if they had never exchanged the slight yet significant, the innocent and solemn tokens of love which even the most timid lovers per-

mit themselves, each dwelt no less in the other's heart, and both knew that they were ready to make the greatest sacrifices, the only pleasures that they could know. Ever since Mme. Claes' death the love in the depth of their hearts had been shrouded in mourning. The gloom in which they lived had deepened into night, and every ray of hope was quenched in tears. Marguerite's reserve had changed to something like coldness, for she felt bound to keep the vow which her mother had demanded of her; and now that she had more liberty than formerly, she became more distant. Emmanuel had shared in her mourning, feeling with his beloved that the least word or wish of love at such a time would be treason against the sovereign laws of the heart. So this passionate love was hidden away more closely than ever. The two souls were in unison, but sorrow had come between them and separated them as effectually as the timidity of youth and respect for the sufferings of her who was now dead; yet there was still left to them the magnificent language of the eyes, the mute eloquence of self-sacrifice, the knowledge that one thought always possessed them both—sublime harmonies of youth, the first steps of love in its infancy.

Emmanuel came every morning for news of Claes and of Marguerite, but he never came into the dining-room, where the family now sat, unless he brought a letter from Gabriel, or Balthazar invited him to enter. Numberless sympathetic thoughts were revealed in his first glance at the girl before him; the reserve that compelled him to assume a conventional demeanor harassed him; but he respected it, and shared the sorrow which caused it, and all the dew of his tears was shed on the heart of his beloved in a glance unspoiled by any after-thought. He lived so evidently in the present moment, he set such high value on a happiness which he thought so fleeting, that Marguerite's heart sometimes smote her, and she told herself that she was ungenerous not to hold out her hand and say, "Let us be friends."

Pierquin still continued his importunities with the obstinacy which is the patience of dulness, possessed by one idea. He judged Marguerite by the ordinary rules of the multitude when judging of women. He imagined that when the words "marriage," "liberty," and "fortune" had been let fall in her hearing they would take root in her mind, and spring up and blossom into wishes which he could turn to his own advantage, and he chose to think that her coldness was nothing but dissimulation. But in spite of all his polite attentions, he was an awkward actor; he sometimes forgot his part, and assumed the despotic tone of a man who is accustomed to make the final decision in all serious questions relating to family life. For her benefit he repeated consoling platitudes, the professional commonplaces which creep like snails over a sorrow, and leave behind them a track of barren words that profane the sanctity of grief. His tenderness was simply cajolery; he dropped his feigned melancholy at the door when he put on his overshoes and took up his umbrella. He took advantage of the privileges which his long intimacy with the Maison Claes had given him, using them as a means of ingratiating himself with the rest of the family to bring Marguerite to make a marriage which was already talked of in the town. So in strong contrast to a true-hearted, devoted, and respectful love was opposed its selfish and calculating semblance. The characters of both men were in harmony with their manner. The one feigned a passion which he did not feel, and seized on every least advantage that gave him a hold on Marguerite; the other concealed his love, and trembled lest his devotion should be too apparent.

Some time after her mother's death, and, as it happened in one day, Marguerite had an opportunity of comparing the two men whom she was in a position to judge, for she was compelled to live in a social solitude which made her inaccessible to any who might have thought of asking her in marriage.

One day, after breakfast, on one of the sunniest mornings

of early April, Emmanuel chanced to call just as M. Claes was going out. Balthazar found his own house almost unendurable, and spent a large part of the day in walking about the ramparts. Emmanuel turned, as though he meant to follow Balthazar, hesitated, seemed to gather up his courage, glanced at Marguerite, and stayed. Marguerite felt sure that he wished to speak with her, and asked him to go into the garden; she sent Félicie to sit with Martha, who was sewing in the ante-chamber on an upper floor, and then seated herself on a garden seat in full view of her sister and the old duenna.

"M. Claes is as much absorbed by his grief as he used to be by science," said the young man as he watched Balthazar pacing slowly across the court. "Every one in Douai is sorry for him; he goes about like a man who has not got his wits about him; he suddenly stops short without a reason and gazes about him and sees nothing——"

"Every one expresses sorrow in a different way," said Marguerite, keeping back the tears. "What did you wish to say to me?" she added, with cold dignity, after a pause.

"Mademoiselle," Emmanuel replied in an unsteady voice, "I scarcely know if I have a right to speak to you as I am about to do. Please think only of my desire to serve you, and believe that a schoolmaster may be so much interested in his pupils as to feel anxious about their future. Your brother Gabriel is over fifteen now; he is in the second class; it is surely time to think about his probable career, and to arrange his course of study accordingly. The decision rests of course with your father, but if he gives it no thought, it may be a serious matter for Gabriel. And yet it would be a mortification to your father, would it not, if you pointed out to him that he was neglecting his son? So, as things are, could you not yourself consult Gabriel as to his inclinations, and help him to choose a course of study, so that if your father at a later day should wish him to enter the civil service or to make a soldier of him, Gabriel will be prepared for his post by a

special training? I am sure that neither you nor M. Claes would wish to bring up Gabriel in idleness——”

“Oh, no!” said Marguerite. “Thank you, M. Emmanuel, you are quite right. When our mother had us taught how to make lace, and took such pains with our drawing, sewing, music, and embroidery, she often said that we could not tell what might happen, and that we must be prepared for everything. Gabriel ought to have resources within himself, so he must have a thorough education. But what is the best career for a man to choose?”

Emmanuel trembled with happiness. “Mademoiselle,” he said, “Gabriel is at the head of his class in mathematics; if he were to enter the *École Polytechnique*, I feel sure that he would acquire practical knowledge there which would be useful to him afterwards all through his life. He would be free to choose a career after his own inclinations after he had left the *École*, and you would have gained time without binding him down to any programme. Men who distinguish themselves there are always sought after. Diplomats, scholars, administrators, engineers, generals, sailors, magistrates, manufacturers, and bankers are all educated at the *École*. So it is nothing at all extraordinary that a young man belonging to a great or wealthy family should study to qualify for admission. If Gabriel should make up his mind to this, I would ask you——will you grant me my request? Say, Yes.”

“What is it?”

“Let me be his tutor?” he said nervously.

Marguerite looked at M. de Solis, then she took his hand and said, “Yes.”

She was silent for a moment, then she added in an unsteady voice—

“How much I value the delicacy which has led you to offer something that I can accept from you. In all that you have just said I can see how much you have thought for us. Thank you.”

Simply as these words were said, Emmanuel turned his head away lest Marguerite should see the tears of happiness in his eyes; he was overcome by the delight of being useful to her.

"I will bring them both to see you," he went on when he had recovered his self-possession. "To-morrow is a holiday." He rose and took leave of Marguerite, who shortly followed him to the house; as he crossed the court he still saw her standing by the dining-room door, and received a last friendly sign of farewell.

After dinner the notary came to call on M. Claes. Marguerite and her father were out in the garden, and Pierquin took up his position between them on the very bench where Emmanuel had sat that morning.

"My dear cousin," he said, addressing Balthazar, "I have come to talk about business to-night. Forty-two days have now elapsed since your lamented wife's demise——"

"I have not noticed how the time went," said Claes, brushing away a tear that rose at the technical term *demise*.

"Oh! monsieur," cried Marguerite, with a glance at the lawyer, "how can you?"

"But, my dear Marguerite, we lawyers are obliged to consider the limits of the time prescribed by law. This matter more particularly concerns you and your co-heirs. All M. Claes' children are under age, so within forty-five days of his wife's demise he is bound to have an inventory made out, so as to ascertain the value of the estate they held in common. How are we to find out if it is solvent or no, and whether there is enough to satisfy the minors' claims?"

Marguerite rose.

"Do not go away, cousin," said Pierquin; "this matter concerns you as well as your father. You know how deeply I feel your grief, but you must give your attention at once to these requirements of the law, otherwise you may both get into serious trouble. I am simply doing my duty as legal adviser to the family."

"He is quite right," said Claes.

"The time expires in two days," Pierquin continued, "and I must set to work to-morrow to make out the inventory, if it is only to postpone the payment of legacy duty which the treasury will demand very shortly. The treasury is not disturbed by compunction, and has no heart; it sets its claws in us at all seasons. So my clerk and I will come here every day from ten to four with M. Raparlier the valuer. As soon as we have finished here in the town, we will go into the country. We can talk about the forest of Waignies by and by. So that is settled, and now let us turn our attention to another point. We must call a family council, and appoint a guardian. M. Conyncks of Bruges is your nearest living relative, but he unluckily has become a Belgian citizen. You ought to write to him, cousin, and find out whether the old gentleman has any notion of settling in France; he has a fine property on this side of the frontier; and you might perhaps induce him and his daughter to move into French Flanders. If he declines to make a change, I will see about arranging for a council of some of the nearer remaining relations."

"What is the use of an inventory?" asked Marguerite.

"To find out how the property stands, and ascertain the assets and debts. When it is all clearly scheduled, the family council takes such steps as it deems necessary on behalf of the minors——"

"Pierquin," said Claes, as he rose from the garden seat, "do anything that you think necessary to protect my children's interests, but spare us the distress of selling anything that belonged to my dear wife——"

He did not finish the sentence, but he spoke with so much dignity, there was such deep feeling in his tones, that Marguerite took her father's hand in hers and kissed it.

"I will return to-morrow, then," said Pierquin.

"Come and breakfast with us," said Balthazar. He seemed to be collecting scattered memories together, for in a moment



he exclaimed: "But in my marriage contract, which was drawn up according to the custom of Hainault, I released my wife from the obligation of making an inventory, in order to spare her the worry and annoyance, and it is quite probable that I was likewise released——"

"Oh! how fortunate!" cried Marguerite. "It would have given us so much trouble——"

"Very well," said Pierquin, who was rather put out; "we will look into your marriage contract to-morrow."

"Then you did not know of this?" said Marguerite, an inquiry which put an end to the interview, for the notary was so much embarrassed by his cousin's home-thrust that he was glad to abandon the discussion.

"The devil is in it!" said he to himself as he crossed the courtyard. "That man, for all his abstractedness, can find his wandering wits in the nick of time, and put a stop to our precautions against him. He will squander his children's money, it is as plain as that two and two make four. Talk of business to a girl of nineteen, and she gets sentimental over it! Here I am racking my brains to save the property of those children by regular means, by coming to an understanding with old Conyncks, and this is the end of it! I have thrown away all my chances with Marguerite; she is sure to ask her father why I wanted an inventory of the property, which she now fancies to be quite unnecessary, and Claes, of course, will tell her that lawyers have a craze for drawing up documents; that we are notaries first, and cousins and friends, and whatnot, afterwards, all sorts of rubbish, in fact."

He slammed the door, storming inwardly at clients who let their sentimentality ruin them.

Balthazar was right. The inventory did not take place. So nothing was done to limit or define the father's powers over his children's property.

Several months went by, and brought no changes to the

Maison Claes. Gabriel, under the able tuition of M. de Solis, studied hard, learned the necessary foreign languages, and prepared to pass the entrance examination at the *École Polytechnique*. Félicie and Marguerite lived in absolute retirement; but, nevertheless, they spent the summer at their father's country house, in order to economize. M. Claes was much occupied by his business affairs; he paid his debts, raising the money on his own property, and went to visit the forest of Waignies.

By the middle of the year 1817 his grief had gradually abated, and he began to feel depressed by the dulness and sameness of the life he led. At first he resisted temptation bravely, and would not allow himself to think of chemistry; but the love of science was only dormant, and in spite of himself his thoughts turned towards his old pursuits. Then he thought he would not begin his experiments; he would not take up his science practically, he would confine himself to theory; but the longer he dwelt with these theories, the stronger his passion grew, and he began to equivocate with himself. He asked himself whether he was really bound not to prosecute his researches, and remembered how his wife had refused his oath. He had certainly vowed to himself that he would make no further attempt to solve the great problem, but the road to success had never been so certain and so plain; was he not surely free to change his mind now that the way was clear? He was then fifty-nine years of age, and his idea possessed him now with the dogged fixity which slowly develops into monomania. Outward circumstances also combined to shake his wavering loyalty.

Europe was at peace. Men of science of various nationalities, cut off from all communication with each other by twenty years of wars, were now free to correspond and to communicate their discoveries and theories to each other. Science was making great strides. Claes found that modern discoveries had a bearing, which his fellow-chemists did not suspect,

upon the problem of the Absolute. Learned men who were devoting their lives to the solution of other scientific enigmas began to think, as he did, that light and heat, and galvanism and electricity, were only different effects of the same cause, and that all the various substances which had hitherto been regarded as different elements were merely allotropic forms of the same unknown element. The fear that some other chemist might effect the reduction of metals, and find the principle of electricity (two discoveries which would lead to the solution of the problem of the Absolute), raised the enthusiasm, which the people of Douai called a mania, to the highest pitch; only those who have felt a like passionate love of science, or who have known the tyranny of ideas, can imagine the force of the paroxysm. Balthazar's frenzy was but the more violent because it had been so long subdued, and now broke out afresh.

Marguerite, who had been watching her father very closely, divined this crisis, and opened the long-closed parlor. She thought that if they sat in that room once more, old painful memories of her mother's death would be awakened, and would act as a restraint, and she was to some extent successful. For a little while her father's grief was reawakened, and the inevitable plunge into the abyss was deferred, but it was only for a little while. She determined to go into society once more, and so to distract Balthazar's attention from these thoughts. Several good marriages were proposed for her, over which Claes deliberated, but Marguerite said that until she was twenty-five she would not marry. In spite of all his daughter's endeavors, in spite of remorseful inner struggles, Balthazar began his experiments again in the early days of the winter. At first they were conducted secretly, but it was not easy to hide such occupations as his from the inquisitive eyes of the maidservants.

One day, therefore, while Marguerite was dressing, Martha said to her, "Mademoiselle, it is all over with us! That

wretch of a Mulquinier (who is the devil himself in human shape, for I have never seen him cross himself) has gone up into the attic again. There is the master on the high road to hell ! Heaven send that he may not be the death of you all, as he was the death of the poor dear mistress ! ”

“Impossible ! ” said Marguerite.

“Come and see their goings-on for yourself.”

Mlle. Claes sprang to the window, and saw, in fact, a thin streak of smoke rising from the laboratory chimney.

“I shall be twenty-one in a few months’ time,” she thought, “and then our property must be squandered no longer ; I must find a way to prevent it.”

When Balthazar finally gave way to his passion, his respect for his children’s interests was, of course, less of a restraint than his affection for his wife had been. Such barriers were easily overleaped, his conscience was more elastic, his passion had grown stronger. Glory, and hard work, and hope, and misery lay before him ; he set out on his way with the energy of full and entire conviction. He felt so sure of the outcome of it all that he worked day and night, flinging himself into his pursuits with a zeal that alarmed his daughters ; they did not know that a man’s health seldom suffers from the work that he loves and does for its own sake.

As soon as her father began his experiments, Marguerite reduced the expenses of housekeeping, and became almost as parsimonious as a miser. Josette and Martha entered into her plans, and seconded her loyally. As for Claes, he was scarcely aware of these retrenchments ; he did not notice that they had been reduced to the bare necessities of life. He began by staying away from the family breakfast ; then the whole day was spent in the laboratory, and he only came down to dinner, and sat for a few silent hours afterwards in the evening in the parlor with the two girls. He never spoke to them ; he did not seem to hear them when they wished him good-night ; he mechanically let them kiss him on both

cheeks. Such neglect as this might have brought about serious consequences if Marguerite had not wielded a mother's authority, if the love in her heart had not been a safeguard.

Pierquin had discontinued his visits entirely; in his opinion nothing could save his cousins from utter ruin. Balthazar's estates, which were worth about two hundred thousand crowns, and brought in sixteen thousand francs, were already incumbered with mortgages to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. Claes had inaugurated his second epoch of scientific enthusiasm by a heavy loan. At that moment his income just sufficed to pay the interest on his debts; and as, with the improvidence characteristic of men who live for an idea, he had made over all the rents of his farms to Marguerite to defray the expenses of the housekeeping, the notary calculated that the end must come in three years' time, when everything would go to rack and ruin, and the sheriff's officers would eat up all that Balthazar had left. Under the influence of Marguerite's coldness, Pierquin's indifference had almost become hostility. He meant to secure his retreat in case his cousin should grow so poor that he might no longer wish to marry her, and spoke of the Claes everywhere in a pitying tone.

"Poor things, they are in a fair way to be ruined," said he. "I did everything I could to save them; but, would you believe it? Mlle. Claes herself set her face against every plan by which the law could step in to secure those children from starvation."

Emmanuel, through his uncle's influence, had been appointed headmaster of the Collège de Douai, his own personal qualifications having eminently fitted him for the post. He came almost every evening to see the two girls, who summoned their old duenna to the parlor as soon as their father left them for the night. Always at the same hour they heard the knock at the door: young M. de Solis was never late. For the past three months Marguerite's more grateful and graciousness had given him confidence; he had developed, and was him-

self. His purity of soul shone like a flawless diamond, and Marguerite learned to know the full value of his steadfast strength of character, when she saw that it had its source in the depths of his nature. She saw the blossoms open out one by one; hitherto she had only known of them by their fragrance. Every day Emmanuel realized some hope of hers, new splendors lighted up the enchanted country of love, the clouds vanished, the sky grew clear and serene, unsuspected treasures which had been hidden in the gloom shone forth. For Emmanuel was more at his ease; he could display the winning grace of the heart, the infectious gaiety of youth, the simplicity that comes of a life of study, the treasures of a fastidious mind and unsophisticated nature, the innocent merriment that suits so well with youthful love. Marguerite and Emmanuel understood each other better; together they had explored the depths of their hearts, and had found the same thoughts, pearls of the same lustre, blended notes of harmony, as clear and sweet as the magic music which holds the divers spellbound under the sea. They had come to know each other through the interchange of ideas in the course of those evening talks, studying each other with a curiosity that grew to be a delicate imaginative sympathy. There was no bashfulness on either side, but perhaps some coquetry. The hours which Emmanuel spent with the two girls under Martha's eyes reconciled Marguerite to her life of anguish and resignation; the love that grew unconsciously was her support in her troubles. Emmanuel's affection expressed itself with the natural grace that is irresistible, with the delicate and delightful wit that reveals fresh phases of deep feeling, as the facets of a precious stone set free all its hidden fires; the wonderful devices that love teaches lovers, which render a woman loyally responsive to the hand of the artist who sets new life into the old forms, to the tones of the voice which give a new significance to a phrase each time it is repeated. Love is not merely a sentiment, it is an art. A

bare word, a hesitation, a nothing, reveals to a woman the presence of the great and sublime artist who can touch her heart without withering it. The farther Emmanuel went, the more charming were the ways in which his love expressed itself.

"I have outstripped Pierquin," he said one evening; "I am the bearer of bad tidings that he is going to bring, but I thought I would rather tell them myself. Your father has sold your forest to some speculators, who have taken the timber as it stands to sell again in smaller quantities; the trees have been cut down already, and all the trunks have been taken away. Three hundred thousand francs were paid down at once, and this was sent to Paris to discharge M. Claes' debts there; but in order to clear his debts entirely, he has been forced to assign to his creditors a hundred thousand francs out of the hundred thousand crowns still due to him on the purchase money."

Just at that point Pierquin came in.

"Well, my dear cousin," he said, "you are ruined, you see! I told you how it would be, but you would not listen to me. Your father has a good appetite; he only made one bite of your forest. Your guardian, M. Conyncks, is away at Amsterdam, where he is negotiating the sale of his Belgian estates, and while his back is turned Claes seizes the opportunity to do this stroke of business. It is hardly fair. I have just written to old Conyncks, but it will be all up with you by the time he gets here. You will be obliged to take proceedings against your father. It will not take very long to settle the affair in a court of law, but Claes will not come out of it very well; M. Conyncks will be compelled to take action, the law requires it in such cases. And all this has come of your wilfulness! Do you see now how prudent I was, and how devoted to your interests?"

"I have some good news for you, mademoiselle," said young de Solis in his gentle voice; "Gabriel has been admitted as a

pupil at the *École Polytechnique*; the difficulties which were raised at first have been cleared away."

Marguerite thanked him by a smile, and said, "Then I shall find a use for my savings. Martha," she added, speaking to the old servant, "we must begin at once to make ready Gabriel's outfit. Poor Félicie, we both must work hard," she said, with a kiss on her sister's forehead.

"He will return home to-morrow, and you will have him here for about ten days; on the 15th of November he must be in Paris."

"Cousin Gabriel is well advised," said the notary, as he scanned the headmaster; "he will have to make his way in the world. But now, my dear Marguerite, the honor of the family is at stake; will you listen to me this time?"

"Not if it is a question of marriage."

"But what will you do?"

"Nothing, cousin. What should I do?"

"You are of age."

"I shall be of age in a few days' time. Is there any course which you can suggest that will reconcile our interests with our duty to our father and with the honor of the family?"

"You can do nothing, cousin, without your uncle. That is clear. When he comes back to Douai I will call again."

"Good-evening, monsieur," said Marguerite.

"The poorer she grows, the more airs she gives herself," thought the notary. Aloud he said, "Good-evening, mademoiselle. M. de Solis, I have the honor to wish you good-day," and he went away without paying any attention to Félicie or to Martha.

When the door closed on him, Emmanuel spoke, with hesitation in his voice: "I have been studying the Code for the past two days," he said, "and I have taken counsel with an old lawyer, one of my uncle's friends. If you will allow me, I will go to Amsterdam to-morrow. Listen, dear Marguerite."

He had spoken her name for the first time. She thanked



him by a glance and a gentle inclination of the head, and listened smilingly, though her eyes were full of tears.

"You can speak before my sister," said Marguerite; "she has no need to learn resignation to a life of hardship and toil, she is so brave and sweet, but from this discussion she will learn how much we need all our courage."

The two sisters clasped each other's hands, as if to renew the pledge of the closer union brought about by a common trouble.

"Leave us, Martha."

"Dear Marguerite," Emmanuel began, and something of the happiness that he felt at thus acquiring one of the least privileges of affection could be felt in his voice, "I have the names and addresses of the purchasers, who have not yet paid the balance of the two hundred thousand francs for the felled timber. To-morrow, if you give your consent, a lawyer acting in M. Conyncks' name shall serve a writ of attachment on them. Your great-uncle will return in a week's time. He will call a family council and emancipate Gabriel, who is now eighteen. When that has been done, you and your brother will be in a position to demand your rights, and you can require your share of the proceeds of this sale of the wood. M. Claes could not refuse you the two hundred thousand francs which have been attached; as for the remaining hundred thousand francs, they could be secured to you by a mortgage on this house that you are living in. M. Conyncks will demand securities for the three hundred thousand francs which belong to Mademoiselle Félicie and to Jean, and your father will be obliged to mortgage his property in the plains of Orchies, which are already encumbered with a debt of a hundred thousand crowns. The law regards mortgages for the benefit of minors as a first charge, so everything will be saved. M. Claes' hands will be tied for the future; your landed property is inalienable; he will be unable to borrow any more money on his own, which will be mortgaged beyond their

value, and the whole arrangement will be a family affair; there will be no lawsuits and no scandal. Your father will perforce set about his investigations less recklessly, if, indeed, he does not give them up altogether."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "but how shall we live? There will be no interest paid on the hundred thousand francs secured to us on this house so long as we continue to live in it. The farms in the plains of Orchies will bring in just enough to pay interest on the mortgages. What shall we do?"

"Well, in the first place," said Emmanuel, "if you invest Gabriel's remaining fifty thousand francs in the funds, at present prices it will bring in four thousand livres; that will be sufficient to pay all his expenses at the *École* in Paris. Gabriel cannot touch the principal nor the money secured to him on this house until he comes of age, so you need not fear that he will squander a penny of it, and you will have one expense the less. In the second place, is there not your own share, a hundred and fifty thousand francs?"

"My father will be sure to ask me for them," she cried in dismay, "and I could not refuse him."

"Well, then, dear Marguerite, you can secure the money by robbing yourself. Invest it in the funds in your brother's name; it would bring you in twelve or thirteen thousand livres, and you could manage to live on that. An emancipated minor cannot touch his principal without the consent of the family council, so you will gain three years of freedom from anxiety. In three years' time your father will either have solved his problem, or, as is more probable, he will have given it up as hopeless; and when Gabriel comes of age he can transfer the stock into your name, and the accounts can be finally settled among the four of you."

Marguerite asked for an explanation of the provisions of the law which she could not understand at first, and again they went over every point. It was certainly a novel situa-

tion—two lovers poring over a copy of the Code, which Emmanuel had brought with him in order to make the position of minors clear to Marguerite. Love's penetration came to the aid of her woman's quick-wittedness, and she soon grasped the gist of the matter.

The next day Gabriel returned home. M. de Solis came also, and from him Balthazar heard the news of his son's admission to the *École Polytechnique*. Claes expressed his acknowledgments by a wave of the hand. "I am very glad to hear it," he said; "so Gabriel is to be a scientific man, is he?" and the head of the house returned to his laboratory.

"Gabriel," said Marguerite, as Balthazar went out, "you must work hard, and you must not be extravagant. Do as others do, but be very careful; and while you are in Paris spend your holidays with our friends and relations there, and do not contract the expensive habits which ruin young men. Your necessary expenses will amount to nearly a thousand crowns, so you will have a thousand francs left for pocket money. That should be enough."

"I will answer for him," said Emmanuel de Solis, laying his hand on his pupil's shoulder.

A month later M. de Conyncks and Marguerite had obtained all the required guarantee from M. Claes. Emmanuel's prudent advice had been approved and carried out to the letter. Balthazar felt ashamed of the sale of the forest. His creditors had harassed him, until he had been driven to take this rash step to escape from them; and now, when he was confronted with the consequences of his deeds, when he was face to face, moreover, with his stern cousin, who was inflexible where honor was concerned, he did all that was required of him. He was, in fact, not ill pleased to repair so easily the mischief he had half-unconsciously wrought. He put his signature to the various papers laid before him with the preoccupied air of a man for whom science was the one reality, and all things

else of no moment. He had no more foresight than the negro who sells his wife in the morning for a drop of brandy, and sheds tears over her loss in the evening. Apparently he could not look forward: even the immediate future was beyond his ken; he never stopped to ask himself what must happen when his last ducat has been thrown into the furnace, and prosecuted his researches as recklessly as before. He neither knew nor cared to know that the house in which he lived was his only in name, and, like his estates, had passed into other hands; he did not realize the fact that (thanks to the stringent regulations of the law) he could not raise another penny on the property of which he was in a manner the legal guardian.

The year 1818 went by, and no untoward event occurred. The two girls just managed to defray the necessary expenses of the housekeeping and of Jean's education with the interest of the money invested in Gabriel's name, which he punctually remitted every quarter. M. de Solis lost his uncle in the December of that year.

One morning Marguerite heard from Martha that her father had sold his collection of tulips, the furniture of the state apartments, and all their remaining plate. She was compelled to repurchase the necessary silver for daily use herself, and to have it marked with her own initials. Hitherto she had watched Balthazar's depredations in silence; but after dinner that evening she asked Félicie to leave her alone with her father, and when he had seated himself by the fireside as usual, Marguerite spoke. She had nerved herself for the trying ordeal of the impending struggle with her father.

"You are the master here, dear father," she said; "you can sell everything, even your children. We will all obey you without a murmur; but I must point out to you that we have no money left, that we have scarcely enough to live upon this year, and that Félicie and I have to work night and day to earn the money to pay for Jean's school expenses by the lace dress

which we are making. Father dear, give up your researches, I implore you."

"You are right, dear child; in six weeks they will come to an end. I shall have discovered the Absolute, or the Absolute will be proved to be undiscoverable. You will have millions——"

"But leave us bread to eat meanwhile," pleaded Marguerite.

"Bread? Is there no bread in the house?" said Claes in blank dismay. "No bread in the house of a Claes! What has become of all our property?"

"You have cut down the forest of Waignies. The ground has not been cleared as yet, so it brings in nothing, and the rents of the farms at Orchies are not sufficient to pay interest on the mortgages."

"Then how do we live?" he asked.

Marguerite held up her needle.

"The interest on Gabriel's money helps us," she added, "but it is not enough. I shall just make both ends meet at the end of the year if you do not overwhelm me with bills that I did not expect, for you say nothing about your purchases. I feel quite sure that I have enough to meet my quarterly expenses, it is all planned out so carefully—and then a bill is sent in for soda or potash, or zinc or sulphur, and all sorts of things."

"Have patience and wait another six weeks, dear child, and then I will be very prudent. You shall see wonders, my little Marguerite."

"It is quite time to think of your own affairs. You have sold everything; pictures, tulips, silver-plate—nothing is left to us; but at any rate you will not run into debt again?"

"I am determined to make no more debts."

"No more debts!" she cried. "Then there are debts?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing, mere trifles," he said, reddening, as he lowered his eyes.

For the first time in her life Marguerite felt humiliated by

her father's humiliation ; it was so painful to her, that she could not bring herself to inquire into the matter ; but a month later a messenger came from a Douai bank with a bill of exchange for ten thousand francs, which bore Claes' signature. When Marguerite asked for a day's delay, and expressed her regret that she had not received any notice and so was unprepared to meet the bill, the messenger informed her that Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville held nine others, each for a like amount, which would fall due in consecutive months.

"It is all over with us !" cried Marguerite, "the time has come."

She sent for her father, and walked restlessly up and down the parlor, speaking to herself, "A hundred thousand francs, or our father must go to prison !—What shall I do ? Oh ! what shall I do ?"

Balthazar did not come. Marguerite grew tired of waiting, and went up to the laboratory. She paused in the doorway, and saw her father standing in a brilliant patch of sunlight in the middle of a vast room filled with machinery and dusty glass vessels ; the tables that stood here and there were loaded with books and numbered and ticketed specimens of various substances ; yet other specimens were heaped on the shelves, along the walls, or flung down beside the furnaces. There was something repugnant to orderly Flemish prejudices in all this confused litter. Balthazar's tall figure rose above a collection of flasks and retorts ; he had thrown off his coat and rolled back his sleeves above the elbows like a workman, his shirt was unfastened, exposing his chest, covered with white hair. He was gazing with frightful intentness on an air-pump, from which he never took his eyes. The receiver of the instrument was covered by a lens constructed of two convex glasses, the space between them being filled with alcohol ; the sunlight that entered the room through one of the panes of the rose window (the rest had been carefully blocked up) was thus focussed on the contents of the receiver. The plate of the

receiver was insulated, and communicated with the wire of a huge voltaic battery. Le Mulquinier was busy at the moment in shifting the plate of the receiver, so that the lens might be maintained in a position perpendicular to the rays of the sun ; he raised his face, which was black with dust, and shouted, "Ah ! mademoiselle, keep away !"

She looked at her father, who knelt on one knee before his apparatus, perfectly indifferent to the rays of sunlight that shone full on his face and lit up his hair until it gleamed like silver ; his brows were knotted, every muscle of his face was tense with painful expectation. The strange things strewn around him, the mysterious machinery dimly visible in the semi-darkness of the rest of the attic, everything about her combined to alarm Marguerite.

"Our father is mad," she said to herself in her dismay.

Then she went up to him and whispered in his ear, "Send Le Mulquinier away."

"No, no, child, I want him ; I am waiting to see the result of an experiment which has never been tried before. For the last three days we have been on the watch for a ray of sunlight ; everything is ready, I am about to concentrate the solar rays on these metals in a perfect vacuum, submitting them simultaneously to the action of a current of electricity. In another moment, you see, I shall employ the most powerful agents known to chemistry, and I alone——"

"Oh, father ! instead of reducing metal to gas, you should keep it to pay your bills of exchange——"

"Wait ! wait !"

"But M. Mersktus is here, father ; he must have ten thousand francs by four o'clock."

"Yes, yes, presently. It is quite right ; I did sign a bill for some small amount which would fall due this month. I thought I should have discovered the Absolute before this. Good heavens ! if only I had a July sun, the experiment would be over by this time."

He ran his fingers through his hair, the tears came into his eyes, and he dropped into an old cane-seated chair.

"That is quite right, sir," said Le Mulquinier. "It is all the fault of that rascally sun that won't shine enough, the lazy beggar."

Neither master nor man seemed to remember Marguerite's presence.

"Leave us, Mulquinier," she said.

"Ah!" cried Claes, "I have it! We will try a new experiment."

"Father, never mind the experiments now," said the young girl when they were alone. "Here is a demand for a hundred thousand francs, and we have not a farthing. Your honor is involved; you must come down and leave the laboratory. What will become of you if you are imprisoned? Shall your white hair and the name of Claes be soiled with the disgrace of bankruptcy? It shall not be, I will not have it, I will find strength to combat your madness; it would be dreadful to see you wanting bread in your old age. Open your eyes to our position; come to your senses at last!"

"Madness!" cried Balthazar, rising to his feet. A light shone in the eyes he fixed on his daughter's face, "*Madness!*" There was something so majestic in his manner as he repeated the word that his daughter trembled. He folded his arms. "Ah! your mother would never have uttered that word," he went on. "She did not shut her eyes to the importance of my researches; she studied science that she might understand me; she saw that I was working for humanity, that there was nothing selfish nor sordid in me. I see that a wife's love rises far above a daughter's affection; yes, love is the loftiest of all feelings. Come to my senses!" he went on, striking his breast. "When did I take leave of them? Am I not myself? We are poor, are we? Very well, my daughter, I choose to be poor; do you understand? I am your father, and you must obey me. You shall be rich again when I wish



it. As for your fortune, it is a mere nothing. When I find a solvent of carbon, I will fill the parlor down stairs with diamonds, but even that is a pitiful trifle compared with the wonders for which I am seeking. Surely you can wait when I am doing my utmost, and spending my life in superhuman efforts to——”

“Father, I have no right to ask an account of the four millions which have melted away in this garret. I will say nothing of my mother, but your science killed her. If I were married, I should no doubt love my husband as my mother loved you; I would sacrifice everything for him, just as my mother sacrificed everything for you. I am doing as she bade me, I have given you all I had to give; you have had proof of it, I would not marry lest you should be compelled to render an account of your guardianship. But let us say no more about the past, let us think of the present. You have brought things to a crisis, and I have come here to put it before you. We must have money to meet these bills; do you understand me? There is absolutely nothing left but the portrait of our ancestor Van Claes. I have come in my mother’s name; my mother, whose heart failed her when she had to struggle for her children’s sake against their father’s will, bade me resist you; I have come in my brothers’ name and my sister’s; father, I have come in the name of all the Claes to bid you cease your experiments, and to retrieve your losses before you turn to chemistry again. If you steel yourself against me, if you use your authority over us only to kill us—your ancestors, and your own honor plead for me, and what can chemistry urge against the voices of your family? I have been your daughter but too well,” Marguerite replied with stern emphasis.

“And now you mean to be my executioner,” he said in a feeble voice.

Marguerite turned and fled. She could not trust herself to play her part any longer; her mother’s voice rang in her ears,

"Love your father, and do not cross him—more than you can help!"

"Here is a pretty piece of work of mademoiselle's," said Le Mulquinier, as he came down into the kitchen for his breakfast. "We had just about put our finger on the secret; we only wanted a blink of July sunlight, and the master—ah! what a man that is! he stands in the shoes of Providence, as you may say. There was not *that*," he said to Josette, clicking his thumb-nail against his front teeth, "between us and the secret, when, presto! up she comes and makes a fuss about some nonsensical bills——"

"Good, then," cried Martha, "pay them yourself out of your wages!"

"Am I to eat dry bread? Where is the butter?" demanded Le Mulquinier, turning to Josette.

"And where is the money to buy it with?" the cook answered tartly. "What, you old villain, if you can make gold in your devil's kitchen, why don't you make butter? It is not near so hard to make, and it would fetch something in the market, and go some way towards making the pot boil. All the rest of us are eating dry bread. The young ladies are living on dry bread and walnuts, and you want to be better fed than your betters? Mademoiselle has only a hundred francs a month to spend for the whole household; there is only one dinner for us all. If you want luxuries, you have your furnaces upstairs, where you fritter away pearls, till they talk of nothing else all over the town. Just look for your roast fowls up there!"

Le Mulquinier took up his bread and left the kitchen.

"He will buy something with his own money," said Martha; "all the better, it is so much saved. Isn't he a stingy old heathen?"

"We must starve him, that is the only way," said Josette. "He has not waxed a single floor this week, that he hasn't; he is always up above, and I am doing his work; he may just

as well pay me for it by treating us to a few herrings: if he brings any home I shall look after them."

"Ah!" said Martha, "there is Mlle. Marguerite crying. Her old wizard of a father would gobble down the house without saying grace. In my country they would have burned him alive for a sorcerer long before this; but they have no more religion here than Moorish infidels."

In spite of herself, Mlle. Claes was sobbing as she came through the gallery. She reached her room, sought for her mother's letter, and read as follows:

"MY CHILD.—If God so wills, my spirit will be with you as you read these lines, the last that I shall ever write; they are full of love for my dear little ones, left to the mercy of a fiend who was too strong for me, a fiend who will have devoured your last morsel of bread, as he gnawed my life and my love! You knew, my darling, if I loved your father, and my love for him is failing now as I die, for I am taking precautions against him: I am doing that which I could not bring myself to confess in my lifetime. Yes, in the depths of my grave I treasure a last resource for you, until the day comes when you will know the last extremity of misfortune. If he has brought you to absolute want, my child; if the honor of our house is at stake, you must ask M. de Solis, if he is still living, or if not, his nephew, our good Emmanuel, for a hundred and seventy thousand francs, which are yours, and which will enable you to live. And if at last you find that nothing can check this passion, if the thought of his children's welfare proves no stronger a restraint than did a regard for my happiness, and he should wrong you still further, then leave your father, for your lives at any rate must not be sacrificed to his. I could not desert him; my place was at his side. It rests with you, Marguerite, to save the family; you must protect Gabriel, Jean, and Félicie at all costs. Take courage, be the guardian angel of the Claes; and you must be firm, Mar-

guerite, I dare not say be ruthless; but if the evil that has been already wrought is to be even partially repaired, you must save something, you must think of yourself as being on the brink of dire poverty, for nothing can stem the course of the passion which took all I had in the world from me. So, my child, out of the fulness of affection you must refuse to listen to the promptings of affection; you may have to deceive your father, but the deceptions will be a glory to you, there will be hard things to say and do, and you will feel guilty, but they will be heroic deeds if they are done to protect your defenceless brothers and sister. Our good and upright M. de Solis assured me of this, and never was there a clearer and more scrupulous conscience than his. I could never have brought myself to speak the words I have written, not even at the point of death. And yet—be tender and reverent in this hideous struggle; soften your refusals, and resist him on your knees. Not even death will have put an end to my sorrow and my tears. Kiss my dear children for me now that you are to become their sole guardian, and may God and all the saints be with you.

JOSEPHINE."

A receipt was enclosed from the Messieurs de Solis, uncle and nephew, for the amount deposited in their hands by Mme. Claes, which they undertook to refund to her children if her family should present the document.

Marguerite called the old duenna, and Martha hurried upstairs to her mistress, who bade her go to ask M. Emmanuel de Solis to come to the Maison Claes.

"How noble and honorable he is!" she thought; "he never breathed a word of this to me, and he has made all my troubles and difficulties his."

Emmanuel came before Martha had returned from her errand.

"You have kept a secret which concerned me," she said, as she held out the paper.

Emmanuel bent his head.

"Marguerite, this means that you are in great distress?" he asked, and tears came to his eyes.

"Ah! yes. You will help me, you whom my mother calls 'our good Emmanuel,'" she said, as she gave him the letter; and, in spite of her trouble, she felt a sudden thrill of joy that her mother approved her choice.

"I have been ready to live or die for you ever since I saw you in the picture gallery," he answered, with tears of happiness and sorrow in his eyes; "but I did not know, and I waited, I did not even dare to hope that one day you would let me die for you. If you really know me, you know that my word is sacred, so you must forgive me for keeping my word to your mother; I could only obey her wishes to the letter, I had no right to exercise my own judgment——"

"You have saved us!" she broke in, as she took his arm, and they went down together to the parlor.

When Marguerite had learned the history of the trust fund she told him the whole miserable story of the straits to which they were reduced.

"We must meet the bills at once," said Emmanuel; "if they have been deposited with Mersktus, you will save interest on them. Then I will send you the remaining seventy thousand francs. My poor uncle left me that amount in gold ducats, so it will be easy to bring them here, and no one will know about it."

"Yes," she said, "bring them at night; our father will be asleep, and we can hide them somewhere. If he knew that I had any money, he might take it from me by force. Oh! Emmanuel, to be suspicious of one's own father," she said, and burst into tears as she leaned her forehead against his breast.

It was in this piteous and gracious entreaty for protection that Marguerite's love spoke for the first time; love had been surrounded from its first beginnings by sorrow, and had grown

familiar with pain, but her heart was too full, and at this last trouble it overflowed.

"What is to be done? What will become of us? He sees nothing of all this; he has not a thought for us nor for himself, for I cannot think how he can live in the garret, it is like a furnace."

"But what can you expect of a man who at every moment of his life cries, like Richard III., 'My kingdom for a horse?'" answered Emmanuel. "He will be inexorable, and you must be equally unyielding. You can pay his bills, and let him have your fortune if you will, but your brothers' and sister's money is neither yours nor his."

"Let him have my fortune!" she repeated, grasping Emmanuel's hand in hers, and looking at him with sparkling eyes. "This is *your* advice to me? And Pierquin told me lies without end, for fear I should part with it."

"Alas!" he said, "perhaps I too am selfish after my own fashion. Sometimes I would have you without a penny, for it seems to me that so you would be nearer to me; sometimes I would have you rich and happy, and then I feel how poor and petty it is to think that the empty pomp of wealth could keep us apart."

"Dear! let us talk no more about ourselves——"

"Ourselves!" he exclaimed in ecstasy; then after a moment he went on, "The evil is great, no doubt, but it is not irreparable."

"It lies with us to repair it; the family has no longer a head. He has utterly forgotten all that he owes to himself and his children, and has lost all sense of right and wrong—for he who was so high-minded, so generous, and so upright, who should have been his children's protector, has squandered their property in defiance of the law. To what depths he must have fallen! Good God! what can he expect to find?"

"Unluckily, dear Marguerite, however culpable he may be as the head of a family, he is quite right from a scientific

point of view to act as he does. Some score of men perhaps in all Europe are capable of understanding him and admire him, though every one else says that he is mad. Still, you are perfectly justified in refusing to surrender the children's money. There is an element of chance in every great discovery. If your father still persists in working out his problem, he will discover the solution without this reckless expenditure, and very possibly just at the moment when he gives it up as hopeless."

"It is well for my poor mother that she died!" said Marguerite. "She would have suffered a martyrdom a thousand times worse than death. The first shock of her collision with science killed her, and there seems to be no end to the struggle——"

"There will be an end to it," said Emmanuel, "when you have absolutely nothing left. There will be an end to M. Claes' credit, and then he will be forced to stop."

"Then he may as well stop at once," said Marguerite, "for we have nothing left."

M. de Solis bought up the bills and gave them to Marguerite. Balthazar came down to dinner a few minutes earlier than usual. For the first time in two years his daughter saw traces of emotion on his face, and his distress was painful to see. He was once more a father; reason had put science to flight. He gave a glance into the courtyard, and then into the garden; and when he was sure that they were alone, he turned to his daughter with sadness and kindness in his face.

"Dear child," he said, taking her hand and pressing it with earnest tenderness, "forgive your old father. Yes, Marguerite, I was in the wrong, and you were altogether right. I have not discovered the secret, so there is no excuse for me. I will go away from here. I cannot look on and see Van Claes sold," he went on, and his eyes turned to the martyr's portrait. "He died for the cause of freedom, and I shall die for science; he is revered, I am hated——"

"Hated, father? Oh! no," she cried, throwing her arms about him; "we all adore you, do we not, Félicie," she asked of her sister, who came into the room at that moment.

"What is it, father dear?" asked the little girl, slipping her hand into his.

"I have ruined you all——"

"Eh!" cried Félicie, "the boys will make a fortune for us. Jean is always at the head of his class."

"Wait a moment, dear father," Marguerite added, and with a charming caressing gesture the daughter led her father to the chimney-piece, and drew several papers from beneath the clock; "here are your drafts, but you must not sign your name to any more bills, for there will be nothing left to pay them with another time——"

"Then you have some money?" Balthazar said in his daughter's ear, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise; and with all her heroism, Marguerite's heart sank at the words. There was such frenzy of joy, and hope, and expectation in her father's face; his eyes were wandering round the room as if in search of the money.

"Yes, father," she said sadly, "I have my fortune."

"Give it to me!" he cried, with an eagerness which he could not control; "I will give you back an hundredfold."

"Yes, I will give it to you," said Marguerite, looking at her father, who did not understand the meaning that lay beneath his daughter's words.

"Ah! my dear child," he said, "you have saved my life! I had thought out a final experiment, the one thing that remains to be tried. If I do not succeed this time, I must renounce the Quest of the Absolute altogether. Come here, darling, give me your arm; if I can compass it, you shall be the happiest woman in the world; you have given me fresh hopes of happiness and fame; you have given me power; I will heap riches upon you, and wealth, and jewels."

He clasped both her hands in his and kissed her forehead,



giving expression to his joy in caresses that seemed almost like abject gratitude to Marguerite. Balthazar had no eyes for any one else during the dinner; he watched her with something like a lover's fondness and alert attention; she could not move but he tried to read her thoughts and to guess her wishes, and waited on her with an assiduity which embarrassed her; there was a youthfulness in his manner which contrasted strangely with his premature old age. But in reply to his caresses and attentions, Marguerite could only draw his attention to their present distress, either by giving expression to her doubts, or by a glance at the empty tiers of shelves along the walls.

"Pshaw!" he said, "in six months' time we will fill them with gold-plate and wonders. You shall live like a queen in state. All the earth will be under our feet; everything will be ours. And all through you, my Marguerite. Margarita!" he mused smilingly, "the name was prophetic. Marguerite means a pearl. Sterne said that somewhere or other. Have you read Sterne? Would you care to read Sterne? It would amuse you."

"They say that pearls are a result of some disease," she said bitterly, "and we have already suffered much."

"Do not be sad; you will make the fortune of those you love; you will be rich and great——"

"Mademoiselle has such a good heart," said Le Mulquinier, and his colander countenance was distorted by a smile.

The rest of the evening Balthazar spent with his daughters, and for them exerted all his powers of conversation and the charm of his personality. There was something magnetic in his looks and tones, a fascination like that of the serpent; the genius and the kindly wit that had attracted Josephine were called into play; he seemed, as it were, to take his daughters to his heart. When Emmanuel de Solis came, he found a family group; the father and children were talking as they had not done for a long time. In spite of himself, the young

headmaster fell under the spell of the scene ; it was impossible to resist Balthazar's manner, de Solis was carried away by it. Men of science, however, deeply absorbed in watching quite other phenomena, bring highly-trained powers of perception to the least details of daily life. Nothing escapes their observation in their own sphere ; they are not oblivious, but they keep to their own times and seasons, and are seldom in touch with the world that lies beyond that sphere ; they know everything, and forthwith forget it all ; they make forecasts of the future for their own sole benefit, foresee the events that take others by surprise, and keep their own counsel. If, while to all appearance they are unconscious of what is passing, they make use of their special 'gift of observation and deduction, they see and understand, and draw their own inferences, and there is an end of it ; work claims them again, and they seldom make any but a blundering use of their knowledge of the things of life. At times when they are roused from their social apathy, or if they happen to drop from the world of ideas to the world of men and women, they bring with them a well-stored memory, and are by no means strangers to what is happening there.

So it was, manifestly, with Balthazar. He had quick sympathies as well as keen-sightedness, and knew the whole of his daughter's life ; he had guessed or learned in some way the almost imperceptible events of the course of the mysterious love that bound her to Emmanuel ; he let the lovers feel that he had guessed their secret, and sanctioned their affection by sharing in it. From Marguerite's father this was the sweetest form of flattery, and they could not resist it. The evening thus spent was delightful after the troubled and anxious life the poor girls had led of late. When Balthazar at last left them, after they had basked, as it were, for a while in the sunlight of his presence, and bathed in his tenderness, Emmanuel de Solis' constrained manner changed ; he emptied his pockets of three thousand ducats, of which he had been

uneasily conscious. He set them down on Marguerite's work-table, and she covered them with some house-linen which she was mending. Then he went back for the remainder. When he returned, Félicie had gone to bed. It was past eleven o'clock, and Martha, who was sitting up for her mistress, was still busy in Félicie's room.

"Where shall I hide it?" asked Marguerite; she could not resist the temptation of passing the coins through her fingers, a childish freak, a moment's delay, which cost her dear!

"Those pedestals are hollow," said Emmanuel; "I will raise the column off its base, and we will slip the gold inside it: no one will think of looking there for it."

But just as Marguerite was making the last journey but one between the work-table and the pedestal, she gave a shrill cry and let the piles of ducats fall, the paper in which they were wrapped gave way, and the gold coins rolled in all directions over the floor; her father was standing in the doorway: his eager look terrified her.

"What are you doing?" he asked, looking from his daughter, who stood transfixed with terror, to the startled de Solis, who had hastily risen to his feet—too late, his kneeling position at the foot of the pedestal had been sufficient to betray him.

The din of the falling gold rang hideously in their ears; the coins lay scattered abroad on the floor, a sinister augury of the future.

"I thought so," said Balthazar; "I felt sure that I heard the rattle of gold."

He was almost as excited as the other two; one thought possessed them both, and made their hearts beat so violently that the sounds could be heard in the great silence which suddenly fell in the parlor.

"Thank you, M. de Solis," said Marguerite, with a glance of intelligence, which said: "Play your part; help me to save the money."

"What!" cried Balthazar, with a clairvoyant glance at his daughter and Emmanuel, "then this gold——?"

"Belongs to M. de Solis, who has been so good as to lend it to me that we may fulfil our engagements," she answered.

M. de Solis reddened, and turned as if to go.

"Monsieur," said Balthazar, laying a hand on his arm, "do not slip away from my grateful thanks."

"You owe me no thanks, M. Claes. The money belongs to Mlle. Marguerite; she has borrowed it of me on security," he answered, looking at Marguerite, who thanked him by an almost imperceptible movement of her eyelids.

"I cannot allow that," said Claes, taking up a pen and a sheet of paper from the table where Félicie had been writing. He turned to the two bewildered young people.

"How much is there!" he asked.

Balthazar's ruling passion had made him craftier than the most cunning of deliberate scoundrels; he meant to have the money in his own hands. Marguerite and Emmanuel de Solis hesitated.

"Let us count it," said Balthazar.

"There are six thousand ducats," Emmanuel said.

"Seventy thousand francs," returned Claes.

Marguerite and Emmanuel exchanged glances, and Emmanuel took courage.

"M. Claes," he said respectfully, "your note of hand is worth nothing—pardon the technical expression. This morning I lent mademoiselle a hundred thousand francs to buy up the bills which you were unable to meet, so evidently you are not in a position to give me any security. This money belongs to your daughter, who can dispose of it as seems good to her; but I have only lent it with the understanding that she will sign a document giving me a claim on her share of the land at Waignies, on which the forest once stood."

Marguerite turned her head away to hide the tears that

filled her eyes. She knew Emmanuel's purity of heart. He had been brought up by his uncle in the most scrupulous practice of the virtues prescribed by religion ; she knew that he held lies in special abhorrence ; he had laid his life and his heart at her feet, and now he was sacrificing his conscience for her.

"Good-night, M. de Solis," said Balthazar ; "I had not looked for suspicion in one whom I regard almost with a father's eyes."

Emmanuel gave Marguerite a piteous glance, and then crossed the courtyard with Martha, who closed and bolted the house door after the visitor had gone.

As soon as the father and daughter were alone together, Claes said—

"You love him, do you not?"

"Father, let us go straight to the point," she said. "You want this money? You shall never have any of it," and she began to gather up the scattered ducats, her father helping her in silence. Together they counted it over, Marguerite showing not a trace of distrust. When the gold was once more arranged in piles, Claes spoke in the tones of a desperate man—

"Marguerite, I must have the gold!"

"If you take it from me, it will be theft," she said coolly. "Listen to me, father ; it would be far kinder to kill us outright than to make us daily endure a thousand deaths. You see, one of us must give way——"

"So you would murder your father," he said.

"We shall have avenged our mother's death," she said, pointing to the spot where Mme. Claes had died.

"My child, if you only knew what is at stake, you would not say such things as these to me. Listen ! I will explain what the problem is. But you would not understand !" he cried in despair. "After all, give it to me ; believe in your father for once. Yes, I know that I gave your mother pain ;

I know that I have squandered (for that is how ignorant people put it) my own fortune and made great inroads into yours ; I know that you think I am working for what you call madness, but, my angel, my darling, my love, my Marguerite, just listen to me ! If I do not succeed this time, I will put myself in your hands ; all that you desire I will do ; I will give to you the obedience that you owe to me ; I will do your bidding, and administer my affairs as you shall direct ; I will be my children's guardian no longer ; I will lay down my authority. I swear it by your mother !" he said, shedding tears as he spoke.

Marguerite turned her head away ; she could not bear to see his tears ; and Claes, thinking that this was a sign of yielding, flung himself on his knees before her.

"Marguerite ! Marguerite ! give me the gold ! Give it to me to save yourself from eternal remorse. What are twenty thousand francs ? You see, I shall die ; this will kill me. Listen to me, Marguerite ! My promise shall be religiously kept. I will give up my experiments if I fail ; I will go away ; I will leave Flanders, and even France, if you wish it. I will begin again as a mechanic, and build up my fortune *sou by sou*, so that my children may recover at last all that science will have taken from them," he earnestly and piteously cried.

Marguerite tried to persuade her father to rise, but he still knelt to her, and continued, with tears in his eyes—

"Be tender and devoted this once ; it is the last time. If I do not succeed, I myself will acquiesce in your harsh judgment. You can call me a madman, a bad father ; you can say that I am a fool, and I will kiss your hands ; beat me if you will, I will bless you as the best of daughters, remembering that you have given me your very life-blood."

"Ah !" she cried, "if it were only my life-blood, you should have it ; but how can I look on and see my brothers and sister murdered in cold blood for science ? I cannot !

Let it end!" she cried, drying her tears, and putting away her father's caressing hand from her.

"Seventy thousand francs and two months!" he said, rising in anger; "I want no more than that! and my daughter bars my way to fame, my daughter stands between wealth and me. My curse upon you!" he went on, after a moment's pause. "You have neither a daughter's nor a woman's heart! You will never be a wife nor a mother!—Let me have it! Say the word, my dear little one, my precious child. I will adore you!" and he stretched out his hand with horrible eagerness towards the gold.

"I cannot help myself if you take it by force, but God and the great Claes look down upon us now," said Marguerite, pointing to the portrait.

"Then live, if you can, when your father's blood will be on your head!" cried Balthazar, looking at her with abhorrence.

He rose, looked round the parlor, and slowly left it; when he reached the door, he turned and came back as a beggar might, with an imploring gesture, a look of entreaty, but Marguerite only shook her head in reply.

"Farewell, my daughter!" he said gently; "try to live happily," and he left the room, passing up the staircase with slow and measured steps.

When he had gone, Marguerite stood for a while in dull bewilderment; it seemed as if her whole world had slipped from her. She was no longer in the familiar parlor; she was no longer conscious of her physical existence; her soul had taken wings and soared to a world where thought annihilates time and space, where the veil drawn across the future is lifted by some divine power. It seemed to her that she lived through whole days between each sound of her father's footsteps on the staircase; and when she heard him moving above in his room, a cold shudder went through her. A sudden warning vision flashed like lightning through her brain; she

fled noiselessly up the dark staircase with the speed of an arrow, and saw her father pointing a pistol at his head.

"Take it all!" she cried, as she sprang towards him.

She fell into a chair. At the sight of her white face, Balthazar began to weep—such tears as old men shed; he was like a child; he kissed her forehead, speaking incoherent, meaningless words; he almost danced for joy, and tried to play with her as a lover plays with the mistress who has made him happy.

"Enough of this, father!" she said; "remember your promise! If you do not succeed, will you obey my wishes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mother!" she cried, turning to the door of Mme. Claes' room, "you would have given it all to him, would you not?"

"Sleep in peace," said Balthazar; "you are a good girl."

"Sleep!" she cried; "the nights that brought sleep are gone with my youth. You have made me old, father, just as you gradually blighted my mother's life."

"Poor little one! If I could only give you confidence, by explaining the results I hope to obtain from a grand experiment that I have just planned, you would see then——"

"I see nothing but our ruin," she said, rising to go.

The next day was a holiday at the Collège de Douai. Emmanuel de Solis came with Jean to see them.

"Well?" he asked anxiously, as he went up to Marguerite.

"I gave way," she said.

"My dear life," he answered, half-sorrowfully, half-gladly, "if you had not yielded, I should have admired you, but I adore you for your weakness."

"Poor, poor Emmanuel! what remains for us?"

"Leave everything to me," he cried, with a radiant glance.

"We love each other; it will be well with us."

Several months went by in unbroken peace. M. de Solis made Marguerite see that her retrenchments and petty econo-



mies were absolutely useless, and advised her to live comfortably, and to use the remainder of the money which Mme. Claes had deposited with him for the expenses of the household. All through those months Marguerite was harassed by the anxiety which had proved too heavy a burden for her mother; for, little as she was disposed to believe in her father's promises, she was driven to hope in his genius. It is a strange and inexplicable thing that we so often continue to hope when we have no faith left. Hope is the flower of desire, and faith is the fruit of certainty.

"If my father succeeds, we shall be happy," Marguerite told herself; Claes and Le Mulquinier said, "We shall succeed!" but Claes and Le Mulquinier were alone in their belief. Unluckily, Balthazar grew more and more depressed day by day. Sometimes he did not dare to meet his daughter's eyes at dinner; sometimes, on the other hand, he looked at her in triumph. Marguerite spent her evenings in seeking explanations of legal difficulties, with young de Solis as her tutor; she was always asking her father about their complicated family relationships. At last her masculine education was complete; she was ready with plans to put into execution if her father should once more be worsted in the duel with his antagonist—the Unknown X.

About the beginning of July, Balthazar spent a whole day on a bench in the garden, absorbed in sad thoughts. Once and again he looked about him, at the bare garden beds, which had once been gay with tulips, at the windows of his wife's room, and shuddered, doubtless at the recollection of all that this quest had cost him. He stirred from time to time, and it was plain that he thought of other things than science. Just before dinner, Marguerite took up her needlework, and came out to sit beside him for a few minutes.

"Well, father, you have not succeeded?"

"No, my child."

"Ah!" Marguerite said gently, "I am not going to utter

a word of reproach ; indeed, we are both equally to blame ; but I must claim the fulfillment of your promise ; your promise is surely sacred—you are a Claes. Your children will never show you anything but love and respect ; but from to-day you are in my hands, and must do as I wish. Do not be anxious ; my rule will be mild, and I will do my best to bring it quickly to an end. I am going to leave you for a month—Martha is going with me—so that I may see after your affairs," she added, with a kiss, "for you are my child now, you know. So Félicie will be left in charge. Poor child ! she is barely seventeen ; how can she resist you ? Be generous, and do not ask her for a penny, for she has nothing beyond what is strictly necessary for the housekeeping expenses. Take courage ; give up your investigations and your theories for two or three years, your ideas will mature, and by that time I shall have saved the necessary money, and the problem shall be solved. Now, then, tell me, is not your queen a kind and merciful sovereign ?"

"So all is not yet lost !" the old man answered.

"No, if you will only keep your word."

"I will obey you, Marguerite," said Claes, deeply moved.

Next morning M. Conyncks came from Cambrai for his grand-niece. He had come in his traveling carriage, and only stayed in his cousin's house until Marguerite and Martha could complete the preparations for their journey. M. Claes made his cousin welcome, but he was evidently downcast and humiliated. Old M. Conyncks guessed Balthazar's thoughts ; and as they sat at breakfast, he said, with clumsy frankness—

"I have a few of your pictures, cousin ; I have a liking for a good picture ; it is a ruinous mania, but we all have our weaknesses——"

"Dear uncle," remonstrated Marguerite.

"They say you are ruined, cousin ; but a Claes always has treasures here," he said, tapping his forehead, "and here too, has he not ?" he added, laying his hand on his heart.

"I believe in you, moreover, and having a few spare crowns in my purse, I am using them in your service."

"Ah!" cried Balthazar, "I will repay you with treasures."

"The only treasures we have in Flanders, cousin, are patience and hard work," said Conyncks sternly. "Our ancestor there has the two words graven on his forehead," he added, as he pointed to the portrait of Van Claes.

Marguerite kissed her father and bade him good-bye, gave her last parting directions to Josette and Félicie, and set out for Paris with her great-uncle. He was a widower with one daughter, a girl of twelve, and the owner of an immense fortune; it was not impossible that he might think of marrying again, and the good people of Douai believed that Marguerite was destined to be his second wife. Rumors of this great match for Marguerite reached Pierquin's ears, and brought him back to the Maison Claes. Considerable changes had been wrought in the views of that wide-awake worthy.

Society in Douai had been divided for the past two years into two hostile camps. The noblesse formed one group, and the bourgeoisie the other; and, not unnaturally, the latter cordially hated the former. This sharp division, in fact, was not confined to Douai; it suddenly split France into two rival nations, small jealous squabbles assumed serious proportions and contributed not a little to the widespread acceptance of the Revolution of July, 1830. There was a third party occupying an intermediate position between the ultra-Monarchical and ultra-Liberal camps, to wit, the officials who belonged socially to one or other circle, but who, on the downfall of the Bourbons from power, immediately became neutral. At the outset of the struggle between the noblesse and the bourgeoisie the most unheard-of splendor was displayed at coffee parties. The Royalists made such brilliantly successful efforts to eclipse their Liberal rivals that these epicurean festivities were said to have cost some enthusiastic

politicians their lives ; like ill-cast cannon, they could not stand such practice. Naturally the two circles became more and more restricted and fanatical.

Pierquin, though a very wealthy man as provincial fortunes go, found himself excluded from the aristocratic circle and driven back upon the bourgeoisie. His self-love had suffered considerably in the process ; he had received rebuff upon rebuff ; gradually the men with whom he had formerly rubbed shoulders dropped his acquaintance. He was forty years of age, the limit of time when a man who contemplates marriage can think of taking a young wife. The matches to which he might aspire were among the bourgeoisie, but his ambition looked longingly back towards the aristocratic world from which he had been thrust, and he cast about for a creditable alliance which should reinstate him there. The Claes family lived so much out of the world that they knew nothing of all these social changes. Claes, indeed, belonged by birth to the old aristocracy of the province, but it seemed not at all likely that, absorbed as he was by scientific interests, he would share in the recently introduced class prejudices. However poor she might be, a daughter of the house of Claes would bring with her the dower of gratified vanity, which is eagerly coveted by all parvenues.

Pierquin, therefore, renewed his visits to the Maison Claes. He had made up his mind to this marriage, and to attain his social ambitions at all costs. He bestowed his company on Balthazar and Félicie in Marguerite's absence, and discovered, rather late in the day, that he had a formidable rival in Emmanuel de Solis. Emmanuel's late uncle the Abbé had left his nephew no inconsiderable amount of property, it was said ; and in the eyes of the notary, who looked at everything from an undisguisedly material standpoint, Emmanuel in the character of his uncle's heir was a rival to be dreaded : Pierquin was more disquieted by Emmanuel's money than by his attractive personality. Wealth restored all its lustre to the

name of de Solis. Gold and noble birth were twin glories that reflected splendor upon each other. The notary saw that the young headmaster treated Félicie as a sister, and he became jealous of this sincere affection. He tried to eclipse Emmanuel, mingling conventional phrases of gallantry with the small talk of the day, and the airs of a man of fashion with the dreamy, pensive melancholy which was not ill suited to his face. He had lost all his illusions, he said, and turned his eyes on Félicie as if to let her know that she, and she alone, could reconcile him with life. And Félicie, to whom compliments and flattery were a novelty, listened to the language which is always sweet to hear, even when it is insincere ; she mistook his emptiness for depth ; she had nothing to occupy her mind, and her cousin became the object of the vague sentiments that filled her heart. Possibly, though she herself was not conscious of the fact, she was jealous of the attentions which Emmanuel showed her sister, and she wished to be likewise some man's first thought. Pierquin soon saw that Félicie showed more attention to him than to Emmanuel, and this encouraged him to persist in his attempt, until he went farther than he had intended. Emmanuel looked on, watching the beginning of this passion, simulated in the lawyer, artlessly sincere in Félicie, whose future was at stake. Whispered phrases were exchanged between the cousins when Emmanuel's back was turned, little colloquies, trifling deceptions, which gave to the stolen words and glances a treacherous sweetness that might give rise to innocent errors.

Pierquin hoped and intended to turn his intimacy with Félicie to his own account, and to discover Marguerite's reasons for taking the journey to Paris ; he wanted to know whether there was any question of her marriage, and whether he must renounce his pretensions ; but, in spite of his transparent manœuvres, neither Balthazar nor Félicie could throw any light on the subject, for the very sufficient reason that they themselves knew nothing of Marguerite's plans ; on her

accession to power she seemed to have adopted the maxims of statecraft, and had kept her own counsel.

Balthazar's brooding melancholy and depression made the evenings tedious. Emmanuel had succeeded in persuading him to play at backgammon, but Balthazar's thoughts were elsewhere all the while; and, as a rule, the great chemist, with all his intellectual powers, seemed positively stupid. His expectations had come to nothing; his humiliation was great; he had squandered three fortunes; he was a penniless gambler; he was crushed beneath the ruins of his house, beneath the burden of hopes that were disappointed but not extinct. The man of genius, curbed by necessity, acquiescing in his own condemnation, was a tragic spectacle which would have touched the most unfeeling nature. Pierquin himself could not but feel an involuntary respect for this caged lion with the look of baffled power in the eyes which were calm by reason of despair, and faded from excess of light; there was a mute entreaty for charity in them which the lips did not dare to frame. Sometimes his face suddenly lighted up as he devised a new experiment; and then Balthazar's eyes would travel round the room to the spot where his wife had died, and tears like burning grains of sand would cross the arid pupils of his eyes, grown over-large with thought, and his head would drop on his breast. He had lifted the world like a Titan, and the world had rolled back heavily on his breast. This giant sorrow, controlled so manfully, had its effect on Pierquin and Emmanuel, who at times felt so much moved by it that they were ready to offer him a sum of money sufficient for another series of experiments—so infectious are the convictions of genius! Both young men began to understand how Mme. Claes and Marguerite could have flung millions into the abyss; but reflection checked the impulses of their hearts, and their good-will manifested itself in attempts at consolation which increased the anguish of the fallen and stricken Titan.

Claes never mentioned his oldest daughter, showed no uneasiness at her prolonged absence, and did not appear to notice her silence, for she wrote neither to him nor to Félicie. He seemed to be displeased if Solis or Pierquin asked him for news of her. Did he suspect that Marguerite was plotting against him? Did he feel himself lowered in his own eyes now that he had abdicated and made over his rights as a father to his child? Had he come to love her less because they had changed places? Perhaps all these things counted for something, and mingled with other and vaguer feelings which overclouded his soul; he chose to say nothing of Marguerite, as though she were in some sort of disgrace.

Great men, however great, known or unknown, lucky or unlucky in their endeavors, are still human, and have their weaknesses. Unluckily, too, they are condemned to suffer doubly, for their qualities as well as for their defects; and perhaps Balthazar was as yet unused to the pangs of a wounded vanity. The days, the evenings which all four spent together, were full of melancholy, and overshadowed by vague, uneasy apprehensions, while Marguerite was away. They were days like a barren waste; they were not utterly without consolations, a few flowers bloomed here and there for them to pluck, but the house seemed to be shrouded in gloom in the absence of the oldest daughter, who had come to be its life and hope and strength. In this way two months went by, and Balthazar patiently awaited his daughter's return.

Marguerite came back to Douai with her uncle, who did not immediately return to Cambrai. Doubtless he meant to give support to his niece in an impending crisis. Marguerite's return was the occasion of a small family rejoicing. The notary and M. de Solis had been invited to dinner by Félicie and Balthazar; and when the traveling carriage stopped before the door of the house, all four appeared to receive the travelers with great demonstrations of joy. Marguerite seemed glad to be at home in her father's house again; tears

filled her eyes as she crossed the courtyard and went to the parlor. As she put her arms round her father's neck, other thoughts had mingled with the girl's kiss, and she blushed like a guilty wife who cannot dissemble; but when she saw Emmanuel, the troubled look died out of her eyes, the sight of him seemed to give her courage for the task she had secretly set herself. In spite of the cheerfulness on every face and the gaiety of the talk at dinner, father and daughter studied each other with distrust and curiosity. Balthazar did not ask Marguerite a single question as to her stay in Paris, paternal dignity doubtless prevented him; Emmanuel de Solis was equally discreet; but Pierquin, who had so long been acquainted with all the secrets of the family, did not avoid the subject, and concealed his inquisitiveness under an assumption of geniality.

"Well, dear cousin," he said, "did you see Paris, and the theatres——?"

"I saw nothing of Paris," she answered; "I only went out when I was obliged to go. The days went by very tediously for me; I was longing to see Douai again."

"If I had not made a fuss, she would not have gone to the opera; and when she did, she found it tiresome!" said M. Conyncks.

None of them felt at their ease that evening, the smiles were constrained, a painful anxiety lurked beneath the forced gaiety; it was a trying occasion. Marguerite and Balthazar were both tortured by doubts and fears, and the others seemed to feel this. As the evening wore on, the faces of the father and daughter betrayed their agitation more plainly; and though Marguerite did her best to smile, her nervous movements, her glances, the tones of her voice, betrayed her. M. Conyncks and Emmanuel de Solis seemed to understand the noble girl's agitation, and to bid her take courage by expressive glances; and Balthazar, hurt at not being taken into confidence while steps were taken and matters decided which



concerned him, gradually became more and more reserved, and at last sat silent among his children and friends. Shortly, no doubt, Marguerite would inform him of her decisions. For a great man and a father the situation was intolerable.

Balthazar had reached the time of life when things are usually freely discussed with the children of the family, when capacity for feeling is increased by wider experience of life; his face grew graver, more thoughtful, and troubled as the time of his extinction as a citizen drew nearer.

A crisis in the family life was impending, a crisis of which some idea can only be given by a metaphor. The clouds that bore a thunderbolt in their midst had gathered and darkened the sky, while they laughed below in the fields; every one felt the heat and the coming storm, looked up at the heavens, and hurried on his way.

M. Conyncks was the first to go, Balthazar went with him to his room, and Pierquin and Emmanuel took their leave in his absence. Marguerite bade the notary a friendly good-night; she said nothing to Emmanuel, but she clasped his hand tightly, and the tears stood in her eyes as she looked at him. She sent Félicie away, and when Claes came back to the parlor she was sitting there alone.

"My kind father," she said in a tremulous voice, "I could not have brought myself to leave home but for the gravity of our position; but now, after agonies of hope and fear, and in spite of unheard-of difficulties, I have brought back with me some chance of salvation for us all. Thanks partly to your name, partly to our uncle's influence, and the interest of M. de Solis, we have obtained the post of Receiver of Taxes in Brittany for you; it is worth eighteen to twenty thousand francs a year, they say. Our uncle has undertaken to be security for you. Here is your appointment," she added, drawing a paper from her reticule. "For the next few years we must retrench and be content with bare necessities; you would find it intolerable to live on here in the house; our

father ought at least to live as he has always been accustomed to live. I shall not ask you to spare any of your income for us; you will spend it as seems good to you. But I entreat you to remember that we have no income, not a penny except from the amount invested in the funds for Gabriel—he always sends the interest to us. We will live as if the house were a convent; no one in the town shall hear anything about our economies. If you lived on here in Douai, you would be a positive hindrance to us in our efforts to restore comfort. Am I abusing the authority you gave to me when I put you in a position to re-establish your fortune yourself? In a few years' time, if you choose, you will be Receiver-General."

"So, Marguerite," Balthazar said in a low voice, "you are driving me out of my house——"

"I did not deserve such a bitter reproach," said Marguerite, controlling the emotions that surged up in her heart. "You will come back again among us as soon as you can live in your native town in a manner befitting your name. Besides, did you not give me your promise, father?" she went on coldly. "You must do what I ask of you. Our uncle is waiting to go with you to Brittany, so that you may not have to travel alone."

"I shall not go!" cried Balthazar, rising to his feet; "I stand in need of no one's assistance to re-establish my fortune and to pay all that is owing to my children."

"You had better go," said Marguerite, with no sign of agitation in her manner. "I ask you simply to think over our respective positions. I can put the case before you in a very few words; if you stay in the house, your children will go out of it, that you may be the master."

"Marguerite!" cried Balthazar.

"And the next thing to do," she went on, without heeding her father's anger, "will be to inform the minister of your refusal to accept a lucrative and honorable post. We should never have obtained it, in spite of interest and influence, if

our uncle had not adroitly slipped several notes for a thousand francs into a certain lady's glove——”

“All of you will leave me!”

“Yes. If you do not leave us, we must leave you,” she answered. “If I were your only child, I would follow my mother's example; I would not murmur at my fate, whatever you might bring upon me. But my brothers and sister shall not die of hunger and despair under your eyes; I promised this to her who died there,” she said, pointing to her mother's bed. “We have hidden our troubles from you, and endured them in silence, but our strength fails us now. We are not on the brink of a precipice; we are in its lowest depths, father! And if we are to extricate ourselves, we want something besides courage; all our efforts must not be continually thwarted by the freaks of a passion——”

“My dear children!” cried Balthazar, seizing Marguerite's hand, “I will help you; I will work with you; I——”

“This is the way,” she answered, holding out the minister's letter.

“But, my darling, it would take too long to restore my fortune in this way that you are pointing out to me. The results of ten years of work will be lost, as well as the enormous sums of money which the laboratory represents. Our resources are up there,” he said, indicating the garret.

Marguerite went towards the door, saying, “Choose for yourself, father!”

“Ah! my daughter, you are very hard!” he answered, as he sat down in an armchair; but he let her go.

Next morning Marguerite learned from Le Mulquinier that M. Claes had gone out. She turned pale at this simple announcement, and her face spoke so eloquently of cruel anxiety that the old servant said, “Do not alarm yourself, mademoiselle; the master said he would come back again at eleven o'clock to breakfast. He never went to bed at all last night. At two o'clock this morning he was standing by one of the

windows in the parlor looking out at the roof of the laboratory. I was sitting up, waiting in the kitchen; I saw him, he was crying, he is in trouble; and here is the famous month of July again, when the sun has power enough to make us all rich, and if you only——”

“That is enough!” said Marguerite. She knew now what the thoughts were that had harassed her father.

As a matter of fact, it had come to pass with Balthazar, as with all domestic people, that his life was inseparable, as it were, from the places which had become a part of it. His thoughts were wedded to his house and laboratory; he did not know how to do without the familiar surroundings; he was like a speculator, who is at a loss to know what to do with himself on public holidays when he cannot go on 'Change. All his hopes dwelt there in his laboratory; it was the one spot under heaven where he could breathe vital air. This clinging to familiar things and places, so strong an instinct in weak natures, becomes almost tyrannous in men of science and learning. Balthazar Claes was to leave his house; for him this meant that he must renounce his science and his problem, or, in other words, that he must die.

Marguerite was in the last extremity of anxiety and fear until breakfast-time. The thought of Balthazar's attempt to take his life after a similar scene came to her memory, and she feared that her father had found a tragic solution of his difficulties; she walked up and down in the parlor, and shuddered every time the bell rang at the door. Balthazar at last came back. Marguerite watched him cross the court, and, gazing anxiously at his face, could read nothing but the traces of all that storm of grief in its expression. When he came into the parlor she went up to him to wish him good-morning; he put his arms affectionately about her waist, drew her to his breast, kissed her forehead, and said in her ear—

“I have been to see about my passport.”

The tones of her father's voice, his resignation, his caress

almost broke poor Marguerite's heart; she turned her head away to hide the tears which she could not keep back, fled into the garden, and only came back when she had wept at her ease. During breakfast Balthazar was in great spirits, like a man who has decided on his course.

"So we are to start for Brittany, uncle, are we?" he said to M. Conyncks. "I have always thought I should like to see Brittany."

"Living is cheap there," the old uncle remarked.

"Is father going to leave us?" cried Félicie.

M. de Solis came in with Jean at that moment.

"You will let him spend the day with us," said Balthazar, as Jean came to sit beside him; "I am going away to-morrow, and I want to bid him good-bye."

Emmanuel looked across at Marguerite, who hung her head. It was a melancholy day; every one felt sad; every one tried not to give way to painful thoughts or to tears. This was no ordinary parting; it was an exile. And then, every one instinctively felt how humiliating it was for a father thus to proclaim his losses by leaving his family and accepting the post of a paid official at Balthazar's time of life; but he was as magnanimous as Marguerite was firm, and submitted with dignity to the penance imposed on him for the errors which he had committed when carried away by his genius. When the evening was over, and the father and daughter were alone, Balthazar held out his hand to Marguerite. He had been as gentle and affectionate all through the day as in the happiest days of the past; and with a strange tenderness, in which despair was mingled, he asked, "Are you satisfied with your father?"

"You are worthy of *him*," answered Marguerite, turning to the portrait of Van Claes.

Next morning Balthazar, followed by Le Mulquiner, went into his laboratory to take leave of his cherished hopes. Master and man exchanged melancholy glances as they stood

on the threshold of the garret. Everything was in working order, as though those hopes had not yet perished, and they were about to leave it all, perhaps forever. Balthazar looked round at the apparatus about which his thoughts had hovered for so long; there was nothing there but had its associations for him; and had borne a part in his experiments or his investigations. Dejectedly he bade Le Mulquinier set free the gases, evaporate the more noxious acids, and take precautions against possible explosions. As he saw to all these details, bitter regrets broke from him, as from a man condemned to death when they are about to lead him to the scaffold.

"Just look!" he said, stopping before a capsule in which the two wires of a voltaic battery were immersed; "we ought to wait to see the result of this experiment. If it were to succeed my children would not drive their father from his house when he could fling diamonds at their feet. Hideous thought! Here is a combination of carbon and sulphur, in which the carbon plays the part of an electro-positive body; crystallization should commence at the negative pole, and in the case of decomposition the carbon would be deposited there in a crystalline form."

"Ah! that is what it will do!" said Le Mulquinier, looking admiringly at his master.

"But," Balthazar went on after a moment of silence, "the combination is submitted to the influence of that battery which might act——"

"If monsieur desires it, I will soon increase——"

"No, no; it must be left just as it is. That sort of crystallization requires time, and must be left undisturbed."

"Confound it! the crystallization is long enough about it!" cried the manservant.

"If the temperature were to fall, the sulphide of carbon would crystallize," Balthazar said, letting fall stray links of a chain of ideas which was complete in his own mind; "but suppose the action of the battery is brought to bear on it

under certain conditions which I do not know how to set up. This ought to be very carefully watched ;—— it is possible—— But what am I thinking of? There is to be no more chemistry for us, my friend ; we must keep books in a receiver's office somewhere in Brittany."

Claes hurried away and went down stairs to breakfast in his own house for the last time. Pierquin and M. de Solis had joined them. Balthazar was anxious to put an end to the death-agony of science, said farewell to his children, and stepped into the carriage after his uncle ; all the family came with him to the threshold of the door. There, as Marguerite clung to her father in despair, he answered her mute appeal, saying in her ear, " You are a good child ; I bear you no ill-will, Marguerite."

Marguerite crossed the courtyard, and took refuge in the parlor ; kneeling on the spot where her mother died, she made a fervent prayer to God to give her strength to bring the heavy task of her new life to a successful end. She felt stronger already, for an inner voice echoed the applause of angels through her heart, and with it mingled the thanks of her mother, her sister, and brothers. Emmanuel and Pierquin came in ; they had watched the traveling carriage till it was out of sight.

" Now, mademoiselle, what will you do next ! " inquired Pierquin.

" Save the family," she said simply. " We have about thirteen hundred acres of land at Waignies. I mean to have it cleared, and to divide it up into three farms, to erect the necessary farm buildings, and then to let them. I feel sure that in a few years' time, with plenty of patience and prudence, each of us three," she said, turning to her brother and sister, " will possess a farm of about four hundred acres, which some day or other will bring us in fifteen thousand francs yearly. My brother Gabriel's share must be this house and the consols that stand in his name. Then we will pay off our father's

debts by degrees, and give him back his estates when the time comes."

"But, dear cousin," said Pierquin, amazed at Marguerite's clear-headedness and calm summing-up of the situation, "you will want more than two hundred thousand francs if you are going to clear the land and build steadings and buy cattle. Where is the money to come from?"

"That is just where the difficulty comes in," she said, looking from the lawyer to Emmanuel de Solis; "I cannot venture to ask any more of my uncle; he has already become security for our father."

"You have friends!" cried Pierquin. It suddenly struck him that even yet the Claes girls were worth more than five hundred thousand francs apiece.

Emmanuel looked at Marguerite tenderly; but Pierquin, unluckily for him, was still a notary in the midst of his enthusiasm. He answered accordingly, "I can let you have two hundred thousand francs!"

Emmanuel and Marguerite sought counsel of each other by a glance, a glance that sent a ray of light through Pierquin's brain. Félicie blushed up to the eyes; she was so glad that her cousin had proved as generous as she had wished. Marguerite looked at her sister, and guessed the truth at once; during her absence the poor child's heart had been won by Pierquin's meaningless gallantry.

"You shall only pay me five per cent.," he added, "and repay me when you like; you can give me a mortgage on your farms. But do not trouble yourself about it; you shall have nothing to do but to pay the money when all the contracts are completed; I will find you some good tenants, and look after everything for you. I will do it all for nothing, and stand by you like a trusty kinsman."

Emmanuel made a sign to Marguerite, beseeching her to refuse this offer, but she was too much absorbed in watching the shades of expression that crossed her sister's face to notice



him. After a moment's silence she turned to the lawyer with an ironical glance, and answered of her own accord, to M. de Solis' great joy.

"You have stood by us, cousin," she said; "I should have expected no less of you; but we want to free the estates as quickly as possible, and the five per cent. interest would hamper us; I shall wait till my brother comes of age, and we will sell his stock."

Pierquin bit his lips; Emmanuel began to smile gently.

"Félicie, dear child, take Jean back to school," said Marguerite, glancing at her brother. "Take Martha with you. Be very good, Jean, my darling, and do not tear your clothes; we are not rich enough now to buy new ones for you as often as we used to do. There, run away, little man, and work hard at your lessons."

Félicie went out with her brother.

"Cousin," said Marguerite to Pierquin, "and you, monsieur," she added, turning to M. de Solis, "you have doubtless come to visit my father while I was away? I am grateful to you for this proof of your friendship, and I am sure that you will do no less for two poor girls who will stand in need of your advice. Let us understand each other clearly. When I am in Douai I shall always see you with the greatest pleasure; but when Félicie will be left here with no one but Josette and Martha, I need not tell you that she can receive no visitors, not even an old friend and a cousin so devoted to our interests. In our position we must not give the slightest occasion for gossip. We must give our minds to our work for a long time to come and live in solitude."

For several moments no one spoke. Emmanuel, deeply absorbed in watching Marguerite's face, was dumb; Pierquin was at a loss what to say, and took leave of his cousin. He felt furious with himself; he suddenly perceived that Marguerite loved Emmanuel, and that he had acted like the veriest fool.

"Look here, Pierquin, my friend," said he to himself, as he went along the street, "any one who called you an ass would say nothing but truth. What a stupid dolt I am! I have twelve thousand livres a year beside my professional income, to say nothing of my uncle des Racquets; all his money will come to me some of these days, and I shall have as much again then (after all, I don't want him to die, he is thrifty), and I was graceless enough to ask Mlle. Claes for interest! No! After all, Félicie is a sweet and good little thing, who will suit me better. Marguerite has a will like iron; she would want to rule me, and—she would rule me! Come, let us show ourselves generous, Pierquin, let us have less of the notary. I cannot shake off old habits. Bless me! I will fall in love with Félicie, those are my sentiments, and I mean to stick to them. Goodness, yes! She will have a farm of her own—four hundred and thirty acres of good land, for the soil at Waignies is rich, and before long it will bring in from fifteen to twenty thousand livres yearly. My uncle des Racquets dies (poor old gentleman!), I sell my practice, and I am a man of leisure worth fifty thousand livres a year,—fif—ty thou—sand livres! My wife is a Claes; I am connected with several families of distinction. *Diantre!* Then we shall see if Savaron de Savarus, the Courtevelles, and Magalhens will decline to visit a Pierquin-Claes-Molina-Nourho! I will be mayor of Donar; I shall have the Cross of the Legion of Honor; I can be a deputy, nothing will be beyond my reach. So look out, Pierquin, my boy, and let us have no more nonsense, inasmuch as, upon my honor, Félicie—Mademoiselle Félicie Van Claes—is in love with you."

When the two lovers were alone, Emmanuel held out his hand, and Marguerite could not help laying her right hand in his. The same impulse made them both rise to their feet, and turn to go towards their bench in the garden; but in the middle of the parlor her lover could not control

his joy, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, he said to Marguerite—

“I have three hundred thousand francs that belong to you——”

“How is that?” she cried; “did my poor mother leave other sums for us in your keeping?—No?—Then how is this?”

“Oh! my Marguerite, what is mine is yours, is it not? Were you not the first to say *we*?”

“Dear Emmanuel!” she said, pressing the hand that she still held, and instead of going into the garden, she sat down in a low chair.

“It is I who should thank you,” he said, with love in his voice, “since you accept it from me.”

“Dear love,” she said, “this moment atones for many sorrows, and brings us nearer to a happy future! Yes, I will accept your fortune,” she continued, and an angelic smile hovered about her mouth; “I know of a way to make it mine.”

She looked up at Van Claes’ portrait, as if calling on her ancestor to be a witness. Emmanuel de Solis had followed the direction of her eyes; he did not see her draw a little ring from her finger; he did not notice that she had done so until he heard the words—

“Out of the depths of our sorrow one comfort has arisen; my father’s indifference leaves me free to dispose of myself,” she said, holding out the ring. “Take it, Emmanuel; my mother loved you, she would have chosen you.”

Tears came to Emmanuel’s eyes; he turned pale, fell on his knees, and said to Marguerite, as he gave her the ring that he always wore—

“Here is my mother’s wedding ring” (and he kissed the little golden hoop). “My Marguerite, shall I have no pledge but this?” he asked, pointing to the ring she had given him.

She bent forward, and Emmanuel's lips touched her forehead.

"Alas! poor love, are we not doing wrong?" she said in a trembling voice. "We shall have to wait for a long while."

"My uncle used to say that adoration was the daily bread of patience; he spoke of the Christian's love of God; but in this way I can love you, Marguerite; for a long while the thought of you has mingled with the thought of God so that I cannot separate them; I am yours, as I am His."

For a few moments they remained rapt in the sweetest ecstasy. Their feelings were poured out as quietly and naturally as a spring wells up and overflows in little waves that never cease. The fate which kept the two lovers apart was a source of melancholy, which gave to their happiness something of the poignancy of grief. Félicie came back again, all too soon for them. Emmanuel, taught by the charming tact of love, which instinctively divines everything, left the two sisters together, with a glance in which Marguerite could read how much this consideration cost him—a glance that told her how long and ardently he had desired this happiness which had just been consecrated by the betrothal of their hearts.

"Come here, little sister," said Marguerite, putting her arm round Félicie's neck. They went together out into the garden, and sat down on the bench to which one generation after another had confided their love and grief, their plans and musings. In spite of her sister's gay tones and shrewd, kindly smile, Félicie felt something very like a tremor of fear. Marguerite took her hand, and felt that she was trembling.

"Mademoiselle Félicie," her older sister said in her ear, "I am reading your heart. Pierquin has been here very often while I was away; he came every evening, he has whispered sweet words, and you have listened to him."

Félicie blushed.

"Do not defend yourself, my angel," Marguerite answered; "it is so natural to love! Perhaps our cousin's character may alter under the influence of your dear soul; he is selfish, and thinks only of his own interests, but he is kind-hearted, and his very faults will no doubt conduce to your happiness, for he will love you as the fairest of his possessions, you will be a part of his business affairs. Forgive me for that word, darling! You will cure him of the bad habit of thinking of nothing but material interests by teaching him to occupy himself with the affairs of the heart."

Félicie could only put her arms round her sister.

"Besides," Marguerite went on, "he is well-to-do. He belongs to one of the most distinguished and oldest bourgeois families. And you cannot think that I would put obstacles in the way of your happiness, if you choose to find it in a sphere somewhat beneath you?"

"Dear sister!" broke from Félicie.

"Oh, yes; you may trust me!" cried Marguerite. "What more natural than that we should tell each other our secrets?"

These words, so heartily spoken, opened the way for one of those delightful talks in which young girls confide everything to each other. Love had made Marguerite quick to read her sister's heart, and she said at last to Félicie—

"Well, dear little one, we must make sure that the cousin really loves you, and then——"

"Leave it to me," said Félicie, laughing; "I have an example here before me."

"Little goose!" said Marguerite, kissing her forehead.

Pierquin belonged to the class of men who regard marriage as a business contract, a fulfillment of social duties, and a way of transmitting property; it was to him a matter of indifference whether he married Marguerite or Félicie, so long as both bore the same family name and possessed the same amount of dower; yet he was acute enough to see that both of them, to use his own expression, were "romantic and sen-

timental girls," two adjectives employed by commonplace people to ridicule the gifts which nature sows with a grudging hand in the furrows of the human field. Doubtless the lawyer concluded that he had best do at Rome as the Romans do; for the next day he came to see Marguerite, and with a mysterious air took her out into the little garden and began to talk "sentiment," since this was a necessary preliminary, according to social usages, to the usual formal contract drawn up by a lawyer.

"Dear cousin," said he, "we have not always been of one mind as to the best means of bringing you out of your difficulties, but you must acknowledge that I have always been prompted by a strong desire to serve you. Well, then, yesterday my offer of help was completely spoiled by an unlucky trick of speaking, due simply to a lawyer's habit of mind. Do you understand? My heart is not to blame for the absurd piece of folly. I have cared very much about you, and we lawyers have a certain quick-sightedness; I saw that you did not like what I said. It is my own fault! Some one else has been cleverer than I was. Well, I have come to tell you out and out that I love your sister Félicie. So you can treat me as a brother, dip in my purse, take what you will; the more you take, the better you will prove your regard for me. I am wholly at your service, *without interest*—do you understand?—of any sort or description. If only I may be thought worthy of Félicie, that is all I ask. Forgive me for my mistakes, they are due to business habits; my heart is right enough, and I would throw myself into the Scarpe rather than not make my wife happy." He spoke with every indication of sympathy and sincerity.

"This is very satisfactory, cousin; but the matter does not rest with me, it rests with my sister and father," said Marguerite.

"I know that, dear cousin," the notary answered, "but you are like a mother to them all; besides, I have nothing

more nearly at heart than that you should judge of mine correctly."

This way of speaking was characteristic of the honest notary. Later in life, Pierquin's reply to an invitation from the commanding officer at Saint Omer became famous; the latter had asked him to some military festivity, and Pierquin's response was worded thus: "Monsieur Pierquin-Claes de Molina-Nourho, Mayor of the city of Douai, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, will have *that* of being present," etc.

Marguerite accepted his offer only in so far as it related to his professional advice, fearing to compromise her dignity as a woman, her sister's future, or her father's authority. The same day she confided her sister to the care of Josette and Martha, who were devoted body and soul to their young mistress, and entered into all her plans of retrenchment; and Marguerite set out immediately for Waignies, where she began to put her schemes into execution at once, benefited by Pierquin's experience.

The notary reckoned up the time and trouble expended, and regarded it as an excellent investment; he was putting them out to interest, as it were, and, with such a prospect before him, he had no mind to grudge the outlay.

In the first place, he endeavored to spare Marguerite the trouble of clearing the land and getting it ready for cultivation. He found three sons of wealthy farmers, young men who were anxious to settle themselves; to them he pointed out the attractive possibilities offered by such a fertile soil, and succeeded in letting the land to them just as it was, on a long lease. For the first three years they were to pay no rent at all, in the fourth they undertook to pay six thousand francs, twelve thousand in the sixth, and after that, fifteen thousand francs yearly till the expiration of the lease. They also undertook to drain the land, to make plantations, and purchase cattle. While the steadings were in course of erection they began to clear the ground.

Four years after Balthazar's departure, Marguerite had almost retrieved the fortunes of her brother and sister. Two hundred thousand francs, loaned by Emmanuel de Solis, had covered the expenses of the farm buildings. Advice and more substantial help had been readily given to the brave girl, for every one admired Marguerite's courage. She personally superintended the building operations, and looked after her contracts and leases with the good sense, energy, and perseverance which a woman can display when she is sustained by strong feeling.

After the fifth year Marguerite could devote thirty thousand francs of her income to paying off the mortgages on her father's property, and to repairing the havoc wrought by Balthazar's passion in the old house. Besides the rent from their own farms, they had the interest on the capital invested in her brother's name, and the proceeds of her father's property. The process of extinction of the debt was bound to be more and more rapid as the amount of interest decreased. Emmanuel de Solis, moreover, had persuaded Marguerite to take the remaining hundred thousand francs of his uncle's bequest, as well as some twenty thousand francs which he himself had saved, so that in the third year of her administration she could pay off a fairly large amount of debt. This life of courage, self-denial, and self-sacrifice lasted for five years, but it ended at last, thanks to Marguerite's influence and supervision, in complete success.

Gabriel had become a civil engineer, and with his great-uncle's help had made a rapid fortune by the construction of a canal. He found favor in the eyes of his cousin, Mlle. Conyncks, whom her father idolized, one of the richest heiresses in all Flanders. In 1824 Claes' property was free, and the house in the Rue de Paris had repaired its losses. Pierquin made formal application to Balthazar for Félicie's hand, and M. de Solis asked for Marguerite.

At the beginning of the month of January, 1825, Mar-



guerite and M. Conyncks set out for Brittany to bring back the exiled father, whom every one longed to see in his home again. He had resigned his post that he might spend the rest of his days among his children, and his presence should sanction their happiness. Marguerite had often bewailed the empty spaces on the walls of the picture-gallery and the state apartments, which must meet their father's eyes on his return, so that while she was away Pierquin and M. de Solis plotted with Félicie to prepare a surprise for her; the younger sister should also have a share in the restoration of the *Maison Claes*. Both gentlemen had bought several fine pictures, which they presented to Félicie, so that the gallery might be adorned as of old. The same thought had occurred to M. Conyncks, who wished to show his appreciation of Marguerite's noble conduct, and of the way in which she had devoted herself to fulfilling her dying mother's request. He arranged that fifty of his finest pictures, together with some of those that Balthazar had previously sold, should be sent to fill the picture gallery, where there were now no more blank spaces.

Marguerite had visited her father several times, Jean or her sister accompanying her on each journey; but, since her last visit, old age seemed to have gained on Balthazar. He lived extremely penuriously, for nearly all his income was spent on the experiment which brought nothing but disappointment, and probably the alarming symptoms were due to his manner of life. He was only sixty-five years of age, but he looked like a man of eighty. His eyes were deeply sunk in his face, his eyebrows were white, his hair hung in a scanty fringe round his head, he allowed his beard to grow, cutting it with a pair of scissors when its length annoyed him, he stooped like an old vine-dresser, his neglected dress suggested a degree of wretchedness that was frightful when combined with his look of decrepitude. Sometimes his face looked noble still when a great thought lighted it up, but the outlines of his features were obliterated by wrinkles; his fixed gaze, the des-

perate look in his eyes, and his restless uneasiness seemed to be symptoms of insanity, or rather of many forms of insanity. A sudden gleam of hope would give him the look of a monomaniac; an excess of impatience, that he could not guess this secret which flitted before him and eluded his grasp like a will-o'-the-wisp, would blaze out into impotent anger like madness, to be followed by a burst of laughter at his own folly; but, as a rule, he lived in a state of the deepest dejection, and every phase of frenzy was merged in the dull melancholy of the idiot. However fleeting and imperceptible these changes of expression might be for strangers, they were unhappily only too obvious for those who had known the once noble face, the Claes of former years, so sublime in goodness and so great-hearted, of whom scarcely a trace could now be recognized.

Le Mulquinier, like his master, was old and worn by incessant toil, but he had not borne the same burden, nor endured the constant strain of thought; a curious mixture of anxiety and admiration in the way in which he looked at his master might easily have misled a casual observer; he listened respectfully to Claes' slightest word, and watched his movements with a kind of tenderness; he looked after his great and learned master with a care like a mother's; he even seemed to protect him, and, in some ways, actually did protect him, for Balthazar never took any thought for the needs of physical existence. It was touching and painful to see the two old men, both wrapped in the same thought, both so sure of the reality of their hope, inspired by the same restless longing; it was as if they had but one life between them—the one was the soul, and the other the body. When Marguerite and M. Conyncks arrived they found M. Claes living in an inn; his successor had taken his place at once.

Through all the preoccupation of science, Balthazar had felt stirrings of the desire to see his country, his home, and children once more; his daughter's letter had brought good news; he had begun to dream of a crowning series of experi-

ments, which should surely yield at last the secret of the Absolute, and he awaited Marguerite's coming with great impatience.

The young girl shed tears of joy as she flung herself into his arms. This time she had come to receive her reward, the reward of a painful and difficult task, and to ask pardon for her brilliant success in it. But as she looked more closely at her father, she was shocked at the changes wrought in him since the previous visit; she felt as if she had committed a crime, like some great man who violates the liberties of his country to save its national existence. M. Conyncks shared his niece's misgivings; he insisted that his cousin must be moved at once, that the air of his native Douai might restore him to health, as the life by his own hearth should restore his reason.

After the first outpourings of affection, which were much warmer on Balthazar's part than Marguerite had expected, he was strangely attentive to her wishes; he expressed his regret at receiving her in such a poor place; he consulted her tastes in the ordering of their meals, and was as sedulously watchful as a lover. But in his manner also there was something of the uneasiness and anxiety of the culprit who wishes to secure a favorable hearing from a judge. Marguerite knew her father so well that she guessed the motives underlying this affectionate solicitude; she thought that he must have incurred debts in the town, which he was anxious to pay before he went. She watched her father narrowly for a while, and a human heart was laid bare to her gaze. Balthazar seemed to have grown little. The consciousness of his humiliation, the enforced isolation resulting from his scientific pursuits, had made him shy and almost like a child, save when the subject under discussion was connected with his beloved science. He stood in awe of his oldest daughter; he remembered her devotion in the past, the power of mind and character that she had shown, the authority with which he himself had invested her, the

fortune which she had administered so ably; and the indefinable feeling of dread which had taken possession of him on the day when he resigned the authority which he had abused had no doubt grown stronger with time.

Conyncks seemed to be as nothing in Balthazar's eyes; he saw no one but his daughter, and thought of no one else; he even seemed to dread her, as a weak-minded man is overawed by the wife whose will is stronger than his own. Marguerite's heart smote her when she detected a look of terror in his eyes, an expression like that of some little child who has been doing wrong. The noble girl could not understand the contradiction between the magnificent stern outlines of the head, the features worn by scientific labors and strenuous thought, and the weak smile on Balthazar's lips, the expression of artless servility in his face. This sharp contrast between greatness and littleness was very painful to her; she resolved to use her influence to restore her father's self-respect before the great day which was to restore him to his family. When they were left together for a moment, she began at once, seizing the opportunity to say in his ear—

"Have you any debts here, father?"

Balthazar reddened uneasily, and answered, "I do not know, but Le Mulquinier will tell you; he is a good fellow, and knows more about my affairs than I do myself."

Marguerite rang for the servant, and when he came she could not help studying the faces of the two old men.

"Is something wanted, monsieur?" asked Le Mulquinier.

Personal pride and family pride were two of Marguerite's strongest instincts; something in the servant's tone and manner told of an unseemly familiarity between her father and the companion of his labors which gave her a pang.

"It seems that my father is unable to reckon up what he owes here without your memory to aid him, Le Mulquinier," said Marguerite.

"Monsieur owes," Le Mulquinier began, but checked him-

self at a sign from Balthazar, which did not escape Marguerite. She felt surprised and humiliated.

"Tell me exactly how much my father owes," she exclaimed.

"Monsieur owes five thousand francs here in the town to a druggist and wholesale grocer who has supplied us with caustic potash, lead and zinc, and reagents."

"Is that all?" asked Marguerite.

Balthazar made an affirmative sign to Le Mulquinier, who answered like a man under a spell, "Yes, mademoiselle."

"Very well," she said, "I will give you the money."

Balthazar kissed his daughter in his joy. "You are my guardian angel, my child," he said.

He breathed more freely after that. There was less sadness in his eyes as he looked at her; but, in spite of his joy, Marguerite could see that in the depths of his heart he was still troubled, and she guessed that the five thousand francs merely represented the most pressing of the debts contracted for the expenses of the laboratory.

"Be frank with me, father," she said, as she let him draw her towards him, and sat on his knees, "do you owe more than this? Tell me everything; come back to your home without any lurking fear in your mind in the midst of the rejoicing."

"My dear Marguerite," he answered, taking her hands and kissing them with a grace that seemed like a memory of his youth, "shall you scold me?"

"No," she said.

"Really?" he asked, with an involuntary start of childish joy. "Can I really tell you all, everything? and will you pay——"

"Yes," she said, trying to keep back the tears that came to her eyes.

"Very well, then, I owe. Oh! I dare not!"

"Father, do tell me!"

"But it is a great deal," he went on.

She clasped her hands in despair.

"I owe thirty thousand francs to MM. Protez and Chiffreville."

"Thirty thousand francs—all my savings," she said; "but I am glad that I can give them to you," she added, with a reverent kiss on his forehead.

He sprang to his feet, caught his daughter in his arms, and spun round the room with her, lifting her off her feet as though she had been a child; then he set her down in the armchair where she had been sitting, exclaiming, "My dear child, my treasure of love! There was no life left in me. Protez and Chiffreville have written three times; they threaten proceedings—proceedings against *me*, when I have made their fortunes——"

"Then you are still trying to find the solution of your problem, father?" said Marguerite sadly.

"Yes, still," he said, with a frenzied smile, "and I shall find it, never fear!—If you only knew where we are!"

"*We*, who?"

"I mean Mulquinier; he understands me at last; he is a great help to me—Poor fellow, he is so faithful!"

Conyncks came in at that moment and put an end to their conversation. Marguerite made a sign to her father to say no more; she dreaded lest he should lower himself in their uncle's eyes.

It shocked her to see the havoc wrought in that great intellect by incessant preoccupation with a problem perhaps after all insoluble. Balthazar, doubtless, could see nothing beyond his crucibles and furnaces; it never even crossed his mind that his affairs were no longer embarrassed.

They set out for Flanders next day; the journey was a sufficiently long one, and Marguerite had time to see many things on the way that threw gleams of light on the relative positions of Le Mulquinier and his master. Had the servant

gained the ascendancy, which uneducated minds can acquire over the greatest thinkers if they feel that they are indispensable to their betters? Such natures use concession after concession as stepping-stones to complete dominion, and attain their end at last by dint of dogged persistence. Or, on the other hand, was it the master who had come to feel for the servant the sort of affection that springs from use and wont, not unlike the fondness which a craftsman feels for his tool which executes his will, or the Arab for the horse to which he owes his freedom? Little things that passed under Marguerite's watchful eyes decided her to put this affection to the test, by proposing to free Balthazar from what perhaps was a galling yoke.

They spent a few days in Paris on their way back. Marguerite paid her father's debts, and besought the firm of chemists to send nothing to Douai without first giving her notice of Claes' orders. She persuaded her father to make some changes in his costume, and to dress as became a man of his rank. This external transformation gave Balthazar a sort of physical dignity, which augured well for a change in his ideas. Marguerite already felt something of the happiness which she looked for when her father should find the surprises that awaited him in his own house; and their departure for Douai was not long delayed.

Félicie, accompanied by her two brothers, Emmanuel, Pierquin, and the most intimate friends of the three families, rode out three leagues from the town to meet Balthazar. The long journey had given other directions to the chemist's thoughts, the sight of the Flemish landscape had stirred his heart, so that at the sight of the joyous cortège of children and friends he felt so deeply touched that tears filled his eyes, his voice shook, and his eyelids reddened; he took his children in his arms, and seemed as if he could not let them go, showing such passionate affection for them that the onlookers were moved to tears.

He turned pale when he saw his house once more, and sprang out of the carriage with the quickness of a young man ; it seemed to be a pleasure to him to breathe the air in the courtyard once more, to see every trifling detail again ; his happiness was plainly visible in every gesture that he made ; he held himself erect, his face grew young again.

Tears came to his eyes as he stood in the doorway of the parlor, and saw how accurately his daughter had reproduced the old-fashioned silver sconces which he had sold, and how completely every trace of their misfortunes had disappeared. A magnificent breakfast awaited them in the dining-room ; the shelves above the sideboards had been filled with curiosities and silver-plate at least as valuable as the heirlooms which formerly had stood there. Long as the family breakfast lasted, Balthazar scarcely heard all that he wished to hear from each of his children. His return had brought about a sort of reaction in him ; he thought of nothing but family happiness ; he was a father before all things. There was the old courtliness in his manner. In the joy of that first moment of possession he did not ask by what means all that he had squandered had been recovered, and his happiness was complete and entire.

Breakfast over, the father and his four children, and Pierquin the notary, went into the parlor, and Balthazar saw, not without uneasiness, the stamped papers which a clerk had arranged on the table by which he stood, as if awaiting further instructions from his employer. Balthazar stood in amazement before the hearth as his family seated themselves.

"This," said Pierquin, "is an account of his guardianship rendered by M. Claes to his children. It is not very amusing, of course," he added, laughing, after the manner of notaries, who are wont to adopt a jesting tone over the gravest matters of business, "but it is absolutely necessary that you should hear it read."

Although the circumstances of the case might justify the



use of this phrase, M. Claes, with an uneasy conscience, must needs think it a reproach, and he frowned. The clerk began to read; the farther he read, the greater grew Balthazar's astonishment. In the first place, it was ascertained that at the time of his wife's death her fortune had amounted to about sixteen hundred thousand francs, and at the conclusion of the statement of accounts each child's share was paid in full, everything was clear and straightforward, as if the most prudent father of a family had administered the estate. It was shown incidentally that Gabriel's mortgage on the house had been paid off, that Balthazar's dwelling was his own, and that his estates were free from all liabilities. He had recovered his honor as a man, his position as a citizen, his existence as a father all at once; he sank into an armchair and looked round for Marguerite, but, with a woman's exquisite delicacy of feeling, she had stolen away during the reading, to make sure that all her arrangements for the fête had been fully carried out. Every one of Claes' children understood what was passing in his mind when through a film of tears his eyes sought for his daughter; she seemed to their inner vision like a strong, bright angel. Gabriel went to find Marguerite, Balthazar heard her footstep, hurried towards her, met her at the foot of the staircase, and clasped her in his arms.

"Father," she said, as the old man held her tightly, "do nothing, I implore you, to lessen your sacred authority. You must thank me, before them all, for carrying out your wishes so well; *you*, and you alone, must be the author of the changes for the better which may have been effected here."

Balthazar raised his eyes to heaven, looked at his daughter and folded his arms; his face wore a look which none of his children had seen for ten years, as he said, "Why are you not here, Pepita, to admire our child?"

He could say no more. He held his daughter in a tight embrace for a moment, and went back to the parlor.

"Children," he said, with the noble bearing which had so

pre-eminently distinguished him in former years, "we all owe a debt of thanks and gratitude to my daughter Marguerite for the courage and prudence with which she has carried out my plans, while I, too much absorbed by scientific research, left the administration of our affairs and the reins of authority in her hands."

"Ah! now we will read the marriage contracts," said Pierquin, glancing at the clock. "But I have nothing to do with that, inasmuch as the law forbids me to draw up documents for myself and my relations; so M. Raparlier's uncle is coming."

The friends who had been invited to the dinner given to celebrate M. Claes' return and the signing of the contracts now began to arrive, and the servants brought the wedding presents. The assemblage, which rapidly grew, was brilliant by reason of the rank of the visitors and the splendor of their toilet. The three families thus brought together to witness their children's happiness had striven to outshine each other. The parlor was filled almost at once with splendid gifts for the betrothed couples. Gold flowed in on them and sparkled there, stuffs lay unfolded, cashmere shawls lay among necklaces and jewels. Givers and receivers alike felt heartfelt joy; an almost childish delight shone visibly in all faces, so that the magnificence and costliness of the gifts were forgotten by those less nearly concerned, who, as a rule, are sufficiently ready to amuse themselves by counting up the cost.

The ceremony soon began. After the manner traditional in the family of Claes, the parents alone were seated; every one else who was present remained standing about them at a little distance. On the side of the parlor nearest the garden stood Gabriel Claes and Mlle. Conyncks, next to them M. de Solis and Marguerite, her sister Félicie and Pierquin. Balthazar and M. Conyncks (the only two who were seated) took up their position on either side of the notary who had succeeded Pierquin. Jean stood behind his father's armchair;

and on the opposite side of the room, nearest the courtyard, stood an imposing circle, composed of a score of well-dressed women and several men, near relations of Pierquin, Conyncks, or of the Claes, the mayor of Douai, before whom the marriages were to take place, and a dozen of the most devoted friends of the three families, including the first president of the Court-Royal of Douai and the curé of St. Pierre. The homage paid by such an assemblage to the fathers, who seemed for a moment to be invested with regal dignity, gave an almost patriarchal color to the scene. For the first time, during sixteen years, Balthazar forgot the Quest of the Absolute for a moment.

All the persons who had been invited to the signing of the contract and to the dinner were now present. M. Raparlier, having ascertained this from Marguerite and her sister, had returned to his place and taken up the contract of marriage between Marguerite and Emmanuel de Solis, which was to be read first, when the door suddenly flew open, and Le Mulquinier's face appeared beaming with joy and excitement.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" he called.

Balthazar gave Marguerite a despairing glance, beckoned to her, and they went out into the garden together. A presentiment of impending trouble fell on those assembled.

"I did not dare to tell you, dear child," the father said to his daughter, "but you have done so much for me that you will surely help me out of this new trouble. Le Mulquinier loaned me his savings for my last experiment, which was unsuccessful; he loaned me twenty thousand francs, and doubtless the wretched fellow has found out that I am rich again, and wants to have his money; let him have it at once. Oh! my angel, you owe your father's life to him, for he was my sole support and comfort through all my failures; he alone still had faith in me. Without him I must have died——"

"Monsieur, monsieur!" cried Le Mulquinier.

"Well?" said Balthazar, turning towards him.

"A diamond!"

At the sight of the diamond in the old servant's hand, Claes rushed to the parlor. Le Mulquinier began in a whisper—

"I went up to the laboratory——"

The chemist, completely forgetful of his surroundings, gave the old Fleming a look which can only be rendered by the words—

*"You were the first to go up to the laboratory!"*

"And I found this diamond there," the servant went on, "in the capsule which communicated with that battery which we left to its own devices—and it has done the trick, sir!" he added, holding up a white diamond of octahedral form, so brilliant that the eyes of all those assembled were attracted by it.

"My children and friends," said Balthazar, "forgive my old servant, forgive me. This will drive me mad! At some time during the past seven years chance has brought about in my laboratory this result that I have sought in vain to compass for sixteen years—and I was not there! How has it come about? I have no idea. Oh, yes; I know that I submitted a combination of sulphur and carbon to the influence of a voltaic battery, but the process should have been watched from day to day. And now, during my absence, the power of God has been manifested in my laboratory, and I have been unable to watch its workings, for this has been brought about gradually, of course! It is overwhelming, is it not? Accursed exile! accursed fatality! Ah! if only I had watched this long, this slow, this sudden—I know not what to call it—crystallization, transformation, *miracle*, in fact, my children would be—well, richer still. Perhaps the problem would still remain to be solved, but at least the first rays of the dawn of my glory would have shone upon my country; and this moment, when

the longings of affection are satisfied, though it glows with our happiness, would have been gladdened yet more by the sunlight of science."

Every one kept silence ; the disconnected phrases wrung from him by agony were too sincere not to be sublime. All at once Balthazar recovered himself, forced back his despair into some inner depths, and gave the assembly a majestic glance. Other souls caught something of his enthusiasm. He took the sparkling diamond and held it out to Marguerite, saying—

"It belongs to you, my angel."

He dismissed Le Mulquinier by a sign, and spoke to the notary—

"Let us go on," he said.

The words produced a sensation among those who heard them, a responsive thrill such as Talma, in some of his parts, could awaken in a vast listening audience that hung on his words. Balthazar sat down, saying to himself, "To-day I must be a father only." He spoke in a low voice ; but Marguerite, who overheard him, went over to her father and reverently kissed his hand.

"Never was there a man so great !" said Emmanuel, when his betrothed returned to his side ; "never was there so strong a will ; any other would have gone mad."

As soon as the three contracts had been read and signed, every one crowded about Balthazar to ask how the diamond had been made, but he could throw no light on the mysterious event. He looked out at the attic, and pointed to it in a kind of frenzy.

"Yes, the awful power which results from the vibrations of glowing matter, which doubtless produces metals and diamonds, manifested itself there," he said, "for one moment—by chance."

"A chance that came about quite naturally," said one of those people who like to account for everything ; "the old

gentleman left a real diamond lying about. It is so much saved out of all that he has burned up."

"Let us forget this," said Balthazar to the friends who stood about him; "I beg you will not speak of it again to me to-day."

Marguerite took her father's arm to lead him to the state apartments, where a banquet had been prepared. As he followed his guests along the gallery, he saw that it was filled with rare flowers, and that the walls were covered with pictures.

"Pictures!" he cried, "pictures!—and some of the old ones!"

He stopped; for a moment he looked gloomy and sad; he knew by the extent of his own humiliation how great had been the wrong that he had done his children.

"All this is yours, father," said Marguerite, guessing Balthazar's trouble.

"Angel, over whom the angels in heaven must surely rejoice," he cried, "how many times you have given life to your father."

"Let there be no cloud on your brow, and not the least sad thought left in your heart," she answered, "and you will have rewarded me beyond my hopes. I have just been thinking about Le Mulquinier, dearest father; little things you have said of him now and then have made me esteem him, and I confess I have been unjust to him; he ought to live here as a humble friend of yours. Never mind about your debt to him; Emmanuel has saved nearly sixty thousand francs, and Le Mulquinier shall have the money. After he has served you so faithfully, he ought to spend the rest of his days in comfort. And do not be troubled on our account. M. de Solis and I mean to live simply and quietly—without luxury; we can spare the money until you are able to return it."

"Oh, my child! you must never leave me! you must always be your father's providence!"

When she reached the state apartments, Balthazar saw that they had been restored and furnished as splendidly as before. The guests presently went down to the dining-room on the ground floor, flowering shrubs stood on every step of the great staircase. A service of silver-plate of marvelous workmanship, Gabriel's gift to his father, attracted all eyes by its splendor; it was a surprise even to the proudest burghers of Douai, who are accustomed to a lavish display of silver. The guests were waited upon by the servants of the three households of Claes, Conyncks, and Pierquin; Le Mulquinier stood behind his master's chair. Balthazar, in the midst of his kinsfolk at the head of the table, read heartfelt joy in the happy faces that encircled it, and felt so deeply moved that every one was silent, as men are silent in the presence of a great joy or sorrow.

"Dear children!" he said, "you have killed the fatted calf for the return of the prodigal father."

The phrase in which the chemist summed up his position, and which perhaps anticipated harsher criticism, was spoken so generously that every one present was moved to tears; but with the tears the last trace of sadness vanished, and happiness found its expression in the blithe merriment characteristic of family festivals. After the dinner the principal families of Douai began to arrive for the ball, and in its restoration the Maison Claes more than equaled its traditional splendor.

The three weddings shortly followed; the ensuing rejoicings, balls, and banquets drew Claes into the vortex of social life for several months. His oldest son went to live near Cambrai on an estate belonging to his father-in-law, for M. Conyncks could not bear to be separated from his daughter. Mme. Pierquin likewise left her father's roof to preside over a mansion which Pierquin had built, where he meant to live in all the dignity befitting his rank, for he had sold his practice, and his uncle des Racquets had recently died and left him all the wealth which he had slowly amassed. Jean went

to Paris to finish his education ; so of all his children, only M. and Mme. de Solis remained with Balthazar in the old house. He had given up the family home in the rear to them, and lived himself on the second story of the front building. So Marguerite still watched over Balthazar's comfort, and Emmanuel helped her in the congenial task.

The noble girl received from the hands of love the crown most eagerly desired of all—the wreath that is woven by happiness and kept fresh by constancy. Indeed, no more perfect picture of the pure, complete, and acknowledged happiness, of which all women fondly dream, could be found. The unity of heart between two beings who had faced the trials of life so bravely, and who felt for each other such a sacred affection, called forth the admiration and respect of those who knew them.

M. de Solis, who for some time had held an appointment as inspector-general of the university, resigned his post to enjoy his happiness at his leisure, and remained in Douai, where his character and talents were held in such high esteem that his election as a deputy when the time came was already spoken of as certain.

Marguerite, who had been so strong in adversity, became a sweet and tender woman in prosperity. Through the rest of that year Claes was certainly deeply absorbed in his studies ; but though he made a few experiments, involving but little expense, his ordinary income was sufficient for his requirements, and he seemed to neglect his laboratory work. Marguerite had adopted the old tradition of the house, gave a family dinner every month, to which her father, the Pierquins, and the Conyncks came, and received her own circle of acquaintances one day in the week. Her *cafés* had a great vogue. Claes was usually present on these occasions, though he sometimes seemed to be scarcely conscious of his surroundings, but he went into society again so cheerfully to please his daughter that his children might well imagine that he had



given up the attempt to solve his problem. In this way three years went by.

In 1828 a piece of good fortune which befell Emmanuel took him to Spain. Although three numerous families, branches of the house of Solis, stood between him and the family estates, yellow fever, old age, and various freaks of fortune combined to leave them all childless, and the titles and entail passed to Emmanuel, who was the last of his family. By one of those chances which seem less improbable in real life than in books, the lands and titles of the Counts of Nourho had been acquired by the house of Solis. Marguerite would not be separated from her husband, who would be forced to stay long enough in Spain to settle his affairs; moreover, she looked forward to seeing the château of Casa-Real, where her mother had passed her childhood, and the city of Granada, the cradle of the de Solis family. So she went with her husband, leaving the household to Martha, Josette, and Le Mulquinier, who were accustomed to its management. Marguerite had proposed to Balthazar that he should go with them, and he had declined on the score of his great age; but the fact was that he had long meditated certain experiments, which should realize his hopes at last, and this was the true reason of his refusal.

The Comte and Comtesse de Solis y Nourho stayed longer in Spain than they had intended, and a child was born to them there. It was not until the middle of the year 1830 that they reached Cadiz, intending to return to France by way of Italy; but at Cadiz a letter came from Félicie bringing evil tidings. In eighteen months their father had completely ruined himself. Gabriel and Pierquin were obliged to allow him a fixed sum every month to pay for necessary expenses, and the money was paid to Le Mulquinier. The old servant had sacrificed his savings a second time to his master. Balthazar saw no one, not even his own children were admitted into the house. Josette and Martha were both dead; the

coachman, the cook, and the rest of the servants had been dismissed one after another, and the horses and carriages had been sold. Although Le Mulquinier was discreet and taciturn, there was too good ground for believing that the money which Gabriel Claes and Pierquin allowed him for necessaries was spent on his experiments. Indeed, Gabriel and Pierquin were paying the interest of a mortgage on the Maison Claes, effected without their knowledge, lest the house should be sold above his head. None of his children had any influence with the old man of seventy, who still possessed such extraordinary energy and determination even in trifles. It was just possible that Marguerite might regain her old ascendancy over him, and Félicie begged her sister to come home at once; she was in terror lest her father should have put his name to bills once more. Gabriel, Conyncks, and Pierquin had taken alarm at this persistent madness which had spent seven millions of francs without result, and had decided not to pay M. Claes' debts. This letter changed Marguerite's traveling plans; she took the shortest way home to Douai. With her past savings and newly acquired wealth it would be easy to pay her father's debts once more; but she determined to do more than this, she would fulfill her mother's wishes; Balthazar Claes should not sink into a dishonored grave. Clearly she alone had sufficient influence with him to prevent him from carrying out his ruinous career to its natural end, at a time of life when great results could scarcely be expected from his enfeebled powers; but she wished to persuade him, and not to wound his susceptibilities, fearing to imitate the children of Sophocles; possibly her father, after all, was nearing the solution of the scientific problem to which he had sacrificed so much.

M. and Mme. de Solis reached Flanders in 1831, and arrived in Douai one morning towards the end of September. Marguerite ordered the coachman to drive to her house in the Rue de Paris, and found it shut up; a violent ring at the door bell produced no answer. A shopkeeper,

who lived opposite, left his doorstep, whither he had been brought by the noise of the carriages ; many of the neighbors were at their windows, partly because they were glad to see the return of a family so much beloved in the town, partly stirred by a vague feeling of curiosity as to what might happen when Marguerite came back to the Maison Claes. The shopkeeper told the Comte de Solis' man that old M. Claes had left the house about an hour before. Le Mulquinier had doubtless taken him to walk upon the ramparts.

Marguerite sent for a locksmith to force open the door, so as to avoid a scene with her father, if (as Félicie's letter had led her to expect) he should refuse to allow her to enter the house. Emmanuel himself, meanwhile, went in search of the old man to bring him the news of his daughter's arrival, and dispatched his man with a message to M. and Mme. Pierquin.

It did not take long to force open the door. Marguerite went to the parlor to give directions about their baggage. A shiver of horror went through her as she entered—the walls were as bare as if a fire had swept over them. Van Huysium's wonderful carvings and the portrait of the great Claes had been sold to Lord Spencer, so some one said. The dining-room was empty ; there was nothing there but two straw-bottomed chairs, and a wretched table, on which Marguerite saw, with dreadful misgivings, a couple of bowls and plates, two silver spoons and forks, and, on a dish, the remains of a herring, the meal, doubtless, of which Claes and his servant had just partaken. As she hurried through the state apartments, she saw that every room was as bare and forlorn as the parlor and the dining-room ; the idea of the Absolute seemed to have passed through the whole house like a fire.

For all furniture in her father's room, there was a bed, a chair, and a table ; a tallow candle burned down to the socket stood in a battered copper candlestick. The house had been stripped so completely that there were no curtains in the windows ; everything that could bring in a few pence,

even the kitchen utensils, had been sold. Drawn by the feeling of curiosity that survives in us even in the deepest misfortune, Marguerite looked into Le Mulquinier's room; it was as bare and empty as his master's. The drawer in the table stood half-open, and Marguerite caught a glimpse of a pawn-ticket; the servant had pledged his watch a few days previously. She hastened to the attic; the laboratory was as well replenished as it used to be; finally, she had the door of her own room forced open; everything was as she had left it, her father had respected her apartment.

Marguerite glanced round her, burst into tears, and in her heart forgave her father. Even in the frenzy of enthusiasm, which spared nothing else, he had been checked by fatherly love and a feeling of gratitude towards her. This proof of tenderness, received in the depths of her despair, wrought in Marguerite one of those revulsions which prove too strong for the coldest hearts. She went down to the parlor, and waited for her father's coming, with an anxiety which was increased by horrible fears; she was about to see him, would he be changed? Should she see a decrepit, ailing wreck, emaciated by fastings endured through pride? Suppose his reason had failed? Her tears flowed fast in the profaned sanctuary. Scenes of her past life rose up before her. She remembered her struggles, her vain attempts to save her father from himself, her childish days, the mother who had been so happy and so unhappy; everything about her, even the face of her little Joseph who smiled on the desolation, seemed to form part of some unreal, mournful tragedy.

But for all her sad forebodings, she did not foresee the catastrophe of the drama of her father's life, a life so magnificent and so wretched. Claes' affairs were no secret. To the shame of humanity, there were no generous natures to be found in Douai who could reverence the passionate persistence of the man of genius. Balthazar was put under the ban of society; he was a bad father, who had run through half-a-

dozen fortunes, who had spent millions of francs on the search of the philosopher's stone in this enlightened nineteenth century, the century of incredulity, etc.—He was maligned and calumniated; he was branded with the contemptuous epithet of "The alchemist." "He wants to make gold!" They scoffed, and cast it in his teeth.

Has this much-lauded century of ours shown itself so different from all other centuries? It has left genius to die with the brutal indifference of past ages that beheld the deaths of Dante, Cervantes, Tasso, *e tutti quanti*; and ordinary mortals recognize the work of genius even more slowly than kings.

So these opinions concerning Claes had gradually filtered downwards from the aristocratic section to the bourgeoisie, and from the bourgeoisie to the masses. Profound compassion was felt for the aged chemist by people of his own rank, and the populace looked on him with a sort of amused curiosity; both ways of regarding him implied the scornful *Vae victis* with which the crowd closes over fallen greatness.

People, as they went past the house, used to point out the rose-window of the attic where so much gold and coal had been wasted. When Balthazar went along the street, they pointed the finger at him; his appearance was often the signal for a joke or a pitying word from the children or workpeople; but Le Mulquinier, ever on the watch, translated the whisperings into a murmur of admiration for his master, who never suspected the real truth.

Balthazar's eyes still preserved the wonderful clearness which an inward vision of great ideas had given to them, but he had grown deaf. For the peasants, and for vulgar or superstitious minds, the old man was a wizard. The old and splendid home of the Claes was spoken of in narrow streets and country cottages as the "Devil's House;" nothing was lacking to give color to these absurd tales; even Le Mulquinier's appearance gave rise to some of the lying legends about his master. When, therefore, the poor, faithful, old servant

went out to buy their scanty supply of necessities in the market, he not only paid higher prices than any one else for his meagre purchases, but he could buy nothing without receiving insults thrown in as a sort of make-weight; he even thought himself lucky if the superstitious market-women did not refuse to supply him with his miserable pittance of food, for it too often happened that they were afraid to endanger their souls by dealing with a tool of Satan.

The general feeling of the town was hostile to the old great man and the companion of his labors. They were not the better thought of because they were ill clad and wore the shabby clothing of decent poverty that shrinks from begging. Open insult was sure to be offered them sooner or later; and Pierquin, for the sake of his family, always took the precaution of sending two or three of his servants to follow the old men at a distance, and to interfere, if necessary, to protect them, for the influence of the Revolution of July had not improved the manners of the populace.

By some inexplicable chance Claes and Le Mulquinier had gone out early that morning, and M. and Mme. Pierquin's secret vigilance was for once at fault; the two old men were out alone in the town. On their way home they sat down to rest in the Place Saint-Jacques, on a bench in the sun. Boys and children were continually passing by on their way to school, and when they looked across the square and saw the two helpless old men, whose faces brightened as they basked in the sunlight, the children made little groups, and began to talk. Children's chatter usually ends in laughter, and laughter leads to mischief, which has no cruel intention. Seven or eight of the first-comers stood at a little distance and stared at the strange old faces; Le Mulquinier heard their smothered laughter.

"There," cried one, "do you see that one with the forehead like a knee?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, he is a born wise man."

"Papa says he makes gold," put in another.

"Gold? What way does he make it?" asked a third, with a contemptuous gesture.

The smallest of the children, who carried a basket full of provisions, and was munching a slice of bread and butter, went artlessly up to the bench, and said to Le Mulquinier—

"Is it true that you make pearls and diamonds, sir?"

"Yes, little man," said Le Mulquinier, smiling, and patting his cheeks, "learn your lessons, and grow very wise, and we will give you some."

"Oh, sir! give me some too!" was the general cry.

All the children scampered up and crowded about the two chemists like a flock of birds; their cries roused Balthazar from his musings; he gave a start that made them laugh.

"Ah! you little rascals, respect a great man!" said Le Mulquinier.

"A harlequin!" shouted the children; "you are sorcerers!—yes, sorcerers! old sorcerers! *sorcerers*, ah!"

Le Mulquinier sprang to his feet, raised his cane, and threatened the children, who promptly fled, and picked up stones and mud. A workman who was eating his breakfast not far away looked up and saw Le Mulquinier take his cane to drive the children away, thought that he had beaten them, and came to their aid with the formidable cry, "Down with the sorcerers!"

Thus encouraged, the children were pelting the two old men with stones as the Comte de Solis, followed by Pierquin's servants, came into the square. They were too late to stop the shower of mud with which the children bespattered the great man and his servant; the mischief was done. Balthazar had hitherto preserved the full force of his faculties by the monastic habits and temperate life of a man of science, in whom one all-absorbing passion had extinguished all others. In the course of his ruminations the meaning of this scene

suddenly dawned on him. The sudden revulsion of feeling, the contrast between the ideal world in which he lived and the real world about him, was too great a shock ; he fell into Le Mulquinier's arms, struck down by paralysis. He was carried home on a stretcher, his two sons-in-law and the servants going with him. Nothing could prevent the crowd that gathered from following the old man to his house. Félicie and her children were there already, and Gabriel and his wife had come from Cambrai, hearing through their sister of Marguerite's return.

The old man's return to his house was piteous to see. Even as he lay between life and death his chief terror seemed to be the thought that his children would discover the wretchedness in which he had been living. As soon as a bed could be made up in the parlor, every care was bestowed on Balthazar, and towards the end of the day some hopes of his recovery were entertained. But in spite of all that skill could do, the paralysis had left him in an almost childish condition. After the other symptoms had abated, his speech was still affected, perhaps because anger had taken all power to speak from him when he attempted to remonstrate with the children.

General indignation was felt in the town when the news of the affair became known. Some mysterious law working in the minds of men had wrought a revulsion of feeling, and M. Claes regained his popularity. He suddenly became a great man. All the admiration and esteem which had been so long withdrawn was his again. Every one praised his patient toil, his courage, his strength of will, his genius. The magistrates were disposed to treat the small delinquents very harshly ; but the evil was done, and Claes' own family were the first to ask that the affair should be smoothed over.

The parlor was refurnished by Marguerite's directions, silken hangings covered the bare walls where the carved panels once had been ; and when, a few days after his seizure, Claes recovered the use of his faculties, he found himself among luxurious



surroundings ; nothing that could contribute to his comfort had been forgotten. Marguerite came into the parlor just as he tried to say that surely she must have come back. A flush came over Balthazar's face at the sight of her ; his eyes were full of tears that did not fall ; he was still able to grasp his daughter's hand in his cold fingers, and in this pressure he put all the feelings and the thoughts that he could not utter. There was something very sacred and solemn in this farewell, from a dying brain and a heart to which gratitude had brought back some of the glow of the warmth of life.

Exhausted by all his fruitless labors, worn out by his wrestlings with a giant problem, seeing, perhaps, with despair in his heart, the oblivion that waited for his memory, the Titan neared the end of his life. Everything about him spoke of his children's reverent affection. There were signs of wealth and plenty, if these things could have rejoiced his eyes ; the fair picture of their faces to gladden his heart. He could now only express his affection for them by looks, and his eyes were always full of tenderness ; it was as if they had suddenly acquired a strange and varied power of speech, and the light that shone in them was a language easy to understand.

Marguerite paid her father's debts ; and though the ancient glories of the house of Claes had departed, it was shortly refurnished with a magnificence that effaced all memories of its forlorn condition. She was never absent from Balthazar's bedside, and strove to guess his thoughts and to anticipate his slightest wish ; never in action or word displaying aught but the tenderest affection for him.

Several months went by in alternations of hope and despair that mark the progress of the final struggle between life and death in an aged frame. His children came to see him every morning, and spent the day in his room ; they dined there in the parlor by his bedside, and only left him while he slept. The newspapers seemed to be his principal resource ; he took a great interest in the political events of the time, listening

attentively to M. de Solis, who read them aloud to him, and sat close beside him that he might hear every word.

One night towards the end of the year 1832 Balthazar's condition grew critical; the nurse, alarmed by a sudden change in the patient, sent for Dr. Pierquin, and when he came, he decided to remain; Claes' convulsions seemed so like the agony of death that the doctor feared any moment might be his last.

The old man was struggling against the paralysis that bound his limbs. He made incredible efforts to speak; his lips moved, but no sound came from them; his thoughts seemed to blaze from his eyes; his face was drawn with unheard-of anguish; great drops of perspiration broke out on his forehead; his fingers twitched nervously in his despair.

That morning when his children came and embraced him with the affection that grew more intense and more clinging with the near approach of death, he showed none of the happiness that he always felt in their tenderness.

Emmanuel, at a warning glance from Pierquin, hastily tore the newspaper from its wrapper, thinking that perhaps the reading might divert Balthazar's mind from his physical sufferings. As he unfolded the sheet the words *DISCOVERY OF THE ABSOLUTE* caught his eyes and startled him, and he read the paragraph to Marguerite under his breath. It told of a bargain concluded by a celebrated Polish mathematician for the secret of the Absolute, which he had discovered. At the conclusion of the paragraph Marguerite asked her husband for the paper, but, low as the tones of his voice had been, Balthazar had heard him.

Suddenly the dying man raised himself on his elbows; his glance seemed like lightning to his terror-stricken children, the hair that fringed his temples rose, every wrinkle in his face quivered with excitement, a breath of inspiration passed over his face and made it sublime. He raised a hand, clenched in frenzy, with the cry of Archimedes—*EUREKA! (I have*

*found it !*) he called in piercing tones, then he fell heavily back like a dead body, and died with an awful moan. His despair could be read in the frenzied expression of his eyes until the doctor closed them. He could not leave to science the solution of the great enigma revealed to him too late, as the veil was torn asunder by the fleshless fingers of Death.



# THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE.

(*Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu.*)

*To a Lord.*

## I. GILLETTE.

ON a cold December morning in the year 1612, a young man, whose clothing was somewhat of the thinnest, was walking to and fro before a gateway in the Rue des Grands-Augustins in Paris. He went up and down the street before this house with the irresolution of a gallant who dares not venture into the presence of the woman whom he loves for the first time, easy of access though she may be; but after a sufficiently long interval of hesitation, he at last crossed the threshold and inquired of an old woman, who was sweeping out a large room on the ground floor, whether Master Porbus was within. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, the young man went slowly up the staircase, like a gentleman but newly come to court, and doubtful as to his reception by the king. He came to a stand once more on the landing at the head of the stairs, and again he hesitated before raising his hand to the grotesque knocker on the door of the studio, where doubtless the painter was at work—Master Porbus, sometime painter in ordinary to Henri IV. till Marie de Médicis took Rubens into favor.

The young man felt deeply stirred by an emotion that must thrill the hearts of all great artists when, in the pride of their youth and their first love of art, they come into the presence of a master or stand before a masterpiece. For all human sentiments there is a time of early blossoming, a day of generous enthusiasm that gradually fades until nothing is left of happi-

ness but a memory, and glory is known for a delusion. Of all these delicate and short-lived emotions, none so resemble love as the passion of a young artist for his art, as he is about to enter on the blissful martyrdom of his career of glory and disaster, of vague expectations and real disappointments.

Those who have missed this experience in the early days of light purses ; who have not, in the dawn of their genius, stood in the presence of a master and felt the throbbing of their hearts, will always carry in their inmost souls a chord that has never been touched, and in their work an indefinable quality will be lacking, a something in the stroke of the brush, a mysterious element that we call poetry. The swaggerers, so puffed up by self-conceit that they are overly confident of their success, can never be taken for men of talent save by fools. From this point of view, if youthful modesty is the measure of youthful genius, the stranger on the staircase might be allowed to have something in him ; for he seemed to possess the indescribable diffidence, the early timidity that artists are bound to lose in the course of a great career, even as pretty women lose it as they make progress in the arts of coquetry. Self-distrust vanishes as triumph succeeds to triumph, and modesty is, perhaps, distrust of self.

The poor neophyte was so overcome by the consciousness of his own presumption and insignificance, that it began to look as if he was hardly likely to penetrate into the studio of the painter, to whom we owe the wonderful portrait of Henri IV. But fate was propitious ; an old man came up the staircase. From the quaint costume of this new-comer, his collar of magnificent lace, and a certain serene gravity in his bearing, the first arrival thought that this personage must be either a patron or a friend of the court painter. He stood aside therefore upon the landing to allow the visitor to pass, scrutinizing him curiously the while. Perhaps he might hope to find the good nature of an artist or to receive the good offices of an amateur not unfriendly to the arts ; but besides an





*THE OLDER MAN . . . . . ENJOYED HIS LIFE AT THE . . .*





almost diabolical expression in the face that met his gaze, there was that indescribable something which has an irresistible attraction for artists.

Picture that face. A bald high forehead and rugged jutting brows above a small flat nose turned up at the end, as in the portraits of Socrates and Rabelais; deep lines about the mocking mouth; a short chin, carried proudly, covered with a grizzled pointed beard; sea-green eyes that age might seem to have dimmed were it not for the contrast between the iris and the surrounding mother-of-pearl tints, so that it seemed as if under the stress of anger or enthusiasm there would be a magnetic power to quell or kindle in their glances. The face was withered beyond wont by the fatigue of years, yet it seemed aged still more by the thoughts that had worn away both soul and body. There were no lashes to the deep-set eyes, and scarcely a trace of the arching lines of the eyebrows above them. Set this head on a spare and feeble frame, place it in a frame of lace wrought like an engraved silver fish-slice, imagine a heavy gold chain over the old man's black doublet, and you will have some dim idea of this strange personage, who seemed still more fantastic in the sombre twilight of the staircase. One of Rembrandt's portraits might have stepped down from its frame to walk in an appropriate atmosphere of gloom, such as the great painter loved. The older man gave the younger a shrewd glance, and knocked thrice at the door. It was opened by a man of forty or thereabouts, who seemed to be an invalid.

"Good-day, master."

Porbus bowed respectfully, and held the door open for the younger man to enter, thinking that the latter accompanied his visitor; and when he saw that the neophyte stood awhile as if spellbound, feeling, as every artist-nature must feel, the fascinating influence of the first sight of a studio in which the material processes of art are revealed, Porbus troubled himself no more about this second comer.

All the light in the studio came from a window in the roof and was concentrated upon an easel, where a canvas stood untouched as yet save for three or four outlines in chalk. The daylight scarcely reached the remoter angles and corners of the vast room; they were as dark as night, but the silver ornamented breastplate of a Reiter's corslet, that hung upon the wall, attracted a stray gleam to its dim abiding-place among the brown shadows; or a shaft of light shot across the carved and glistening surface of an antique sideboard covered with curious silver-plate, or struck out a line of glittering dots among the raised threads of the golden warp of some old brocaded curtains, where the lines of the stiff heavy folds were broken, as the stuff had been flung carelessly down to serve as a model.

Plaster figures stood about the room; and here and there, on shelves and tables, lay fragments of classical sculpture—torsos of antique goddesses, worn smooth as though all the years of the centuries that had passed over them had been lovers' kisses. The walls were covered, from floor to ceiling, with countless sketches of charcoal, red chalk, or pen and ink. Amid the litter and confusion of color boxes, overturned stools, flasks of oil, and essences, there was just room to move so as to reach the illuminated circular space where the easel stood. The light from the window in the roof fell full upon Porbus' pale face and on the ivory-tinted forehead of his strange visitor. But in another moment the younger man heeded nothing but a picture that had already become famous even in those stormy days of political and religious revolutions, a picture that a few of the zealous worshipers, who have so often kept the sacred fire of art alive in evil days, were wont to go on pilgrimages to see. The beautiful panel represented a Saint Mary of Egypt about to pay her passage across the seas. It was a masterpiece destined for Marie de Médicis, who sold it in later years of poverty.

"I like your saint," the old man remarked, addressing

Porbus. "I would give you ten golden crowns for her over and above the price the Queen is paying; but as for putting a spoke in that wheel—the devil take it!"

"It is good then?"

"Hey! hey!" said the old man; "good, say you?—Yes and no. Your good woman is not badly done, but she is not alive. You artists fancy that when a figure is correctly drawn, and everything in its place according to the rules of anatomy, there is nothing more to be done. You make up the flesh tints beforehand on your palettes according to your formulæ, and fill in the outlines with due care that one side of the face shall be darker than the other; and because you look from time to time at a naked woman who stands on the platform before you, you fondly imagine that you have copied nature, think yourselves to be painters, believe that you have wrested His secret from God. Pshaw! You may know your syntax thoroughly and make no blunders in your grammar, but it takes that and something more to make a great poet. Look at your saint, Porbus! At a first glance, she is admirable; look at her again, and you see at once that she is glued to the background, and that you could not walk round her. She is a silhouette that turns but one side of her face to all beholders, a figure cut out of canvas, an image with no power to move nor change her position. I feel as if there were no air between that arm and the background, no space, no sense of distance in your canvas. The perspective is perfectly correct, the strength of the coloring is accurately diminished with the distance; but, in spite of these praiseworthy efforts, I could never bring myself to believe that the warm breath of life comes and goes in that beautiful body. It seems to me that if I laid my hand on the firm rounded throat, it would be cold as marble to the touch. No, my friend, the blood does not flow beneath that ivory skin, the tide of life does not flush those delicate fibres, the purple veins that trace a network beneath the transparent amber of

her brow and breast. Here the pulse seems to beat, there it is motionless, life and death are at strife in every detail. Here you see a woman, there a statue, there again a corpse. Your creation is incomplete. You had only power to breathe a portion of your soul into your beloved work. The fire of Prometheus died out again and again in your hands; many a spot in your picture has not been touched by the divine flame."

"But how is it, dear master?" Porbus asked respectfully, while the young man with difficulty repressed his strong desire to beat the critic.

"Ah!" said the old man, "it is this! You have halted between two manners. You have hesitated between drawing and color, between the dogged attention to detail, the stiff precision of the German masters and the dazzling glow, the joyous exuberance of Italian painters. You have set yourselves to imitate Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Dürer and Paul Veronese in a single picture. A magnificent ambition truly, but what has come of it. Your work has neither the severe charm of a dry execution nor the magical illusion of Italian *chiaro-oscuro*. Titian's rich golden coloring poured into Albrecht Dürer's austere outlines has shattered them, like molten bronze bursting through the mould that is not strong enough to hold it. In other places the outlines have held firm, imprisoning and obscuring the magnificent glowing flood of Venetian color. The drawing of the face is not perfect, the coloring is not perfect; traces of that unlucky indecision are to be seen everywhere. Unless you felt strong enough to fuse the two opposed manners in the fire of your own genius, you should have cast in your lot boldly with the one or the other, and so have obtained the unity which simulates one of the conditions of life itself. Your work is only true in the centres; your outlines are false, they project nothing, there is no hint of anything behind them. There is truth here," said the old man, pointing to the breast of the

saint, "and again here," he went on, indicating the rounded shoulder. "But there," once more returning to the column of the throat, "everything is false. Let us go no farther into detail; you would be disheartened."

The old man sat down on a stool, and remained a while without speaking, with his face buried in his hands.

"Yet I studied that throat from the life, dear master," Porbus began; "it happens sometimes, for our misfortune, that real effects in nature look improbable when transferred to canvas——"

"The aim of art is not to copy nature, but to express it. You are not a servile copyist, but a poet!" cried the old man sharply, cutting Porbus short with an imperious gesture. "Otherwise a sculptor might make a plaster cast of a living woman and save himself all further trouble. Well, try to make a cast of your mistress' hand, and set up the thing before you. You will see a monstrosity, a dead mass, bearing no resemblance to the living hand: you would be compelled to have recourse to the chisel of a sculptor who, without making an exact copy, would represent for you its movement and its life. We must detect the spirit, the informing soul in the appearances of things and beings. Effects! What are effects but the accidents of life, not life itself? A hand, since I have taken that example, is not only a part of a body, it is the expression and extension of a thought that must be grasped and rendered. Neither painter nor poet nor sculptor may separate the effect from the cause, which are inevitably contained the one in the other. There begins the real struggle! Many a painter achieves success instinctively, unconscious of the task that is set before art. You draw a woman, yet you do not see her! Not so do you succeed in wresting nature's secrets from her! You are reproducing mechanically the model that you copied in your master's studio. You do not penetrate far enough into the inmost secrets of the mystery of form; you do not seek with love enough and perseverance

enough after the form that baffles and eludes you. Beauty is a thing severe and unapproachable, never to be won by a languid love. You must lie in wait for her coming and take her unawares, press her hard and clasp her in a tight embrace, and force her to yield. Form is a Proteus more intangible and more manifold than the Proteus of the legend; compelled, only after long wrestling, to stand forth manifest in his true aspect. Some of you are satisfied with the first shape, or at most by the second or the third that appears. Not thus wrestle the victors, the unvanquished painters who never suffer themselves to be deluded by all those treacherous shadow-shapes; they persevere till nature at the last stands bare to their gaze, and her very soul is revealed.

"In this manner worked Rafael," said the old man, taking off his cap to express his reverence for the king of art. "His transcendent greatness came of the intimate sense that, in him, seems as if it would shatter external form. Form in his figures (as with us) is a symbol, a means of communicating sensations, ideas, the vast imaginings of a poet. Every face is a whole world. The subject of the portrait appeared for him bathed in the light of a divine vision; it was revealed by an inner voice, the finger of God laid bare the sources of expression in the past of a whole life.

"You clothe your women in fair raiment of flesh, in gracious veiling of hair; but where is the blood, the source of passion and of calm, the cause of the particular effect? Why, this brown Egyptian of yours, my good Porbus, is a colorless creature! These figures that you set before us are painted bloodless phantoms; and you call that painting, you call that art!

"Because you have made something more like a woman than a house, you think that you have set your fingers on the goal; you are quite proud that you need not to write *currus venustus* or *pulcher homo* beside your figures, as early painters were wont to do, and you fancy that you have done wonders.

Ah ! my good friend, there is still something more to learn, and you will use up a great deal of chalk and cover many a canvas before you will learn it. Yes, truly, a woman carries her head in just such a way, so she holds her garments gathered into her hand ; her eyes grow dreamy and soft with that expression of meek sweetness, and even so the quivering shadow of the lashes hovers upon her cheeks. It is all there, and yet it is not there. What is lacking ? A nothing, but that nothing is everything.

" There you have the semblance of life, but you do not express its fulness and effluence, that indescribable something, perhaps the soul itself, that envelops the outlines of the body like a haze ; that flower of life, in short, that Titian and Rafael caught. Your utmost achievement hitherto has only brought you to the starting-point. You might now perhaps begin to do excellent work, but you grow weary all too soon ; and the crowd admires, and those who know smile.

" Oh, Mabuse ! oh, my master ! " cried the strange speaker, " thou art a thief ! Thou hast carried away the secret of life with thee ! "

" Nevertheless," he began again, " this picture of yours is worth more than all the paintings of that rascal Rubens, with his mountains of Flemish flesh raddled with vermilion, his torrents of red hair, his riot of color. You, at least, have color there, and feeling and drawing—the three essentials in art."

The young man roused himself from his deep musings.

" Why, my good man, the saint is sublime ! " he cried. " There is a subtlety of imagination about those two figures, the Saint Mary and the Shipman, that cannot be found among Italian masters ; I do not know a single one of them capable of imaging the Shipman's hesitation."

" Did that little malapert come with you ? " asked Porbus of the older man.

" Alas ! master, pardon my boldness," cried the neophyte,



and the color mounted to his face. "I am unknown—a dauber by instinct, and but lately come to this city—the fountain-head of all learning."

"Set to work," said Porbus, handing him a bit of red chalk and a sheet of paper.

The new-comer quickly sketched the Saint Mary line for line.

"Aha!" exclaimed the old man. "Your name?" he added.

The young man quickly wrote "Nicolas Poussin" below the sketch.

"Not bad that for a beginning," said the strange speaker, who had discoursed so wildly. "I see that we can talk of art in your presence. I do not blame you for admiring Porbus' saint. In the eyes of the world she is a masterpiece, and those alone who have been initiated into the inmost mysteries of art can discover her shortcomings. But it is worth while to give you the lesson, for you are able to understand it, so I will show you how little it needs to complete this picture. You must be all eyes, all attention, for it may be that such a chance of learning will never come in your way again. Porbus! your palette."

Porbus went in search of palette and brushes. The little old man turned back his sleeves with impatient energy, seized the palette, covered with many hues, that Porbus handed to him, and snatched rather than took a handful of brushes of various sizes from the hands of his acquaintance. His pointed beard suddenly bristled—a singular movement that expressed the object of a lover's fancy. As he loaded his brush, he muttered between his teeth, "These paints are only fit to fling out of the window, together with the fellow who ground them, their crudeness and falseness are disgusting! How can one paint with this?"

He dipped the tip of the brush with feverish eagerness in the different pigments, making the circuit of the palette several

times more quickly than the organist of a cathedral sweeps the octaves on the keyboard of his clavier for the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin, on either side of the easel, stood stock-still, watching with intense interest.

"Look, young man," he began again, "see how three or four strokes of the brush and a thin glaze of blue let in the free air to play about the head of the poor saint, who must have felt stifled and oppressed by the close atmosphere! See how the drapery begins to flutter; you feel that it is lifted by the breeze! A moment ago it hung as heavily and stiffly as if it were held out by pins. Do you see how the satin sheen that I have just given to the breast rends the pliant, silken softness of a young girl's skin, and how the brown-red, blended with burnt ochre, brings warmth into the cold gray of the deep shadow where the blood lay congealed instead of coursing through the veins? Young man, young man, no master could teach you how to do this that I am doing before your eyes. Mabuse alone possessed the secret of giving life to his figures; Mabuse had but one pupil—that was I. I have had none, and I am old. You have sufficient intelligence to imagine the rest from the glimpses that I am giving you."

While the old man was speaking, he gave a touch here and there; sometimes two strokes of the brush, sometimes a single one; but every stroke told so well that the whole picture seemed transfigured—the painting was flooded with light. He worked with such passionate fervor that beads of sweat gathered upon his bare forehead; he worked so quickly, in brief, impatient jerks, that it seemed to young Poussin as if some familiar spirit inhabiting the body of this strange being took a grotesque pleasure in making use of the man's hands against his own will. The unearthly glitter of his eyes, the convulsive movements that seemed like struggles, gave to this fancy a semblance of truth which could not but stir a young imagination. The old man continued, saying as he did so—

"Paf! paf! that is how to lay it on, young man! Little touches! come and bring a glow into those icy cold tones for me! Just so! Pon! pon! pon!" and those parts of the picture that he had pointed out as cold and lifeless flushed with warmer hues, a few bold strokes of color brought all the tones of the picture into the required harmony with the glowing tints of the Egyptian, and the differences in temperament vanished.

"Look you, youngster, the last touches make the picture. Porbus has given it a hundred strokes for every one of mine. No one thanks us for what lies beneath. Bear that in mind."

At last the restless spirit stopped, and turning to Porbus and Poussin, who were speechless with admiration, he spoke—

"This is not as good as my *Belle Noiseuse*; still one might put one's name to such a thing as this. Yes, I would put my name to it," he added, rising to reach for a mirror, in which he looked at the picture. "And now," he said, "will you both come and breakfast with me. I have a smoked ham and some very fair wine! Eh! eh! the times may be bad, but we can still have some talk about art! We can talk like equals. Here is a little fellow who has aptitude," he added, laying a hand on Nicolas Poussin's shoulder.

In this way the stranger became aware of the threadbare condition of the Norman's doublet. He drew a leather purse from his girdle, felt in it, found two gold coins, and held them out.

"I will buy your sketch," he said.

"Take it," said Porbus, as he saw the other start and flush with embarrassment, for Poussin had the pride of poverty. "Pray take it; he has a couple of king's ransoms in his pouch!"

The three came down together from the studio, and, talking of art by the way, reached a picturesque wooden house hard by the Pont Saint-Michel. Poussin wondered a moment at its ornament, at the knocker, at the frames of the casements, at

the scroll-work designs, and in the next he stood in a vast low-ceiled room. A table, covered with tempting dishes, stood near the blazing fire, and (luck unhoped for) he was in the company of two great artists full of genial good-humor.

"Do not look too long at that canvas, young man," said Porbus, when he saw that Poussin was standing, struck with wonder, before a painting. "You would fall a victim to despair."

It was the *Adam* painted by Mabuse to purchase his release from the prison where his creditors had so long kept him. And as a matter of fact, the figure stood out so boldly and convincingly that Nicolas Poussin began to understand the real meaning of the words poured out by the old artist, who was himself looking at the picture with apparent satisfaction, but without enthusiasm. "I have done better than that!" he seemed to be saying to himself.

"There is life in it," he said aloud; "in that respect my poor master here surpassed himself, but there is some lack of truth in the background. The man lives indeed; he is rising, and will come towards us; but the atmosphere, the sky, the air, the breath of the breeze—you look and feel for them, but they are not there. And then the man himself is, after all, only a man! Ah! but the one man in the world who came direct from the hands of God must have had a something divine about him that is wanting here. Mabuse himself would grind his teeth and say so when he was not drunk."

Poussin looked from the speaker to Porbus, and from Porbus to the speaker, with restless curiosity. He went up to the latter to ask for the name of their host; but the painter laid a finger on his lips with an air of mystery. The young man's interest was excited; he kept silence, but hoped that sooner or later some word might be let fall that would reveal the name of his entertainer. It was evident that he was a man of talent and very wealthy, for Porbus listened to him respectfully, and the vast room was crowded with marvels of art.

A magnificent portrait of a woman, hung against the dark oak panels of the wall, next caught Poussin's attention.

"What a glorious Giorgione!" he cried.

"No," said his host, "it is an early daub of mine——"

"Gramercy! I am in the abode of the god of painting, it seems!" cried Poussin ingenuously.

The old man smiled as if he had long grown familiar with such praise.

"Master Frenhofer!" said Porbus, "do you think you could send me a little of your capital Rhine wine?"

"A couple of pipes!" answered his host; "one to discharge a debt, for the pleasure of seeing your pretty sinner, the other as a present from a friend."

"Ah! if I had my health," returned Porbus, "and if you would but let me see your *Belle Noiseuse*, I would paint some great picture, with breadth in it and depth; the figures should be life-size."

"Let you see my work!" cried the painter in agitation. "No, no! it is not perfect yet; something still remains for me to do. Yesterday, in the dusk," he said, "I thought I had reached the end. Her eyes seemed moist, the flesh quivered, something stirred the tresses of her hair. She breathed! But though I had succeeded in reproducing nature's roundness and relief on the flat surface of the canvas, this morning, by daylight, I found out my mistake. Ah! to achieve that glorious result I have studied the works of the great masters of color, stripping off coat after coat of color from Titian's canvas, analyzing the pigments of the king of light. Like that sovereign painter, I began the face in a slight tone with a supple and fat paste—for shadow is but an accident; bear that in mind, youngster!—Then I began afresh, and by half-tones and thin glazes of color less and less transparent, I gradually deepened the tints to the deepest black of the strongest shadows. An ordinary painter makes his shadows something entirely different in nature from the

high-lights ; they are wood or brass, or what you will, anything but flesh in shadow. You feel that even if those figures were to alter their position, those shadow stains would never be cleansed away, those parts of the picture would never glow with light.

“ I have escaped one mistake, into which the most famous painters have sometimes fallen ; in my canvas the whiteness shines through the densest and most persistent shadow. I have not marked out the limits of my figure in hard, dry outlines, and brought every least anatomical detail into prominence (like a host of dunces, who fancy that they can draw because they can trace a line elaborately smooth and clean), for the human body is not contained within the limits of line. In this the sculptor can approach the truth more nearly than we painters. Nature’s way is a complicated succession of curve within curve. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as drawing. Do not laugh, young man ; strange as that speech may seem to you, you will understand the truth in it some day. A line is a method of expressing the effect of light upon an object ; but there are no lines in nature, everything is solid. We draw by modeling—that is to say, we disengage an object from its setting ; the distribution of the light alone gives to a body the appearance by which we know it. So I have not defined the outlines ; I have suffused them with a haze of half-tints, warm or golden, in such a way that you cannot lay your finger on the exact spot where background and contours meet. Seen from near, the picture looks a blur : it seems to lack definition ; but step back two paces, and the whole thing becomes clear, distinct, and solid ; the body stands out, the rounded form comes into relief ; you feel that the air plays round it. And yet—I am not satisfied ; I have misgivings. Perhaps one ought not to draw a single line ; perhaps it would be better to attack the face from the centre, taking the highest prominences first, proceeding from them through the whole range of shadows to the heaviest of

all. Is not this the method of the sun, the divine painter of the world? Oh, nature! nature! who has surprised thee, fugitive? But, after all, too much knowledge, like ignorance, brings you to a negation. I have doubts about my work."

There was a pause. Then the old man spoke again: "I have been at work upon it for ten years, young man; but what are ten short years in a struggle with nature? Do we know how long Pygmalion wrought at the one statue that came to life?"

The old man fell into deep musings, and gazed before him with wide unseeing eyes, while he played unheedingly with his knife.

"Look, he is in converse with his *dæmon*!" murmured Porbus.

At the word, Nicolas Poussin felt himself carried away by an unaccountable accession of artist's curiosity. For him the old man, at once intent and inert, the seer with the unseeing eyes, became something more than a man—a fantastic spirit living in a mysterious world, and countless vague thoughts awoke within his soul. The effect of this species of fascination upon his mind can no more be described in words than the passionate longing awakened in an exile's heart by the song that recalls his home. He thought of the scorn that the old man affected to display for the noblest efforts of art, of his wealth, his manners, of the deference paid to him by Porbus. The mysterious picture, the work of patience on which he had wrought so long in secret, was doubtless a work of genius, for the head of the Virgin which young Poussin had admired so frankly was beautiful even beside Mabuse's *Adam*—there was no mistaking the imperial manner of one of the princes of art. Everything combined to set the old man beyond the limits of human nature.

Out of the wealth of fancies in Nicolas Poussin's brain an idea grew, and gathered shape and clearness. He saw in this supernatural being a complete type of the artist nature, a na-

ture mocking and kindly, barren and prolific, an erratic spirit intrusted with great and manifold powers, which she too often abuses, leading sober reason, the Philistine, and sometimes even the amateur forth into a stony wilderness where they see nothing; but the white-winged maiden herself, wild as her fancies may be, finds epics there and castles and works of art. For Poussin, the enthusiast, the old man, was suddenly transfigured, and became art incarnate, art with its mysteries, its vehement passion and its dreams. For Poussin the old man now represented a grand ideal.

"Yes, my dear Porbus," Frenhofer continued, "hitherto I have never found a flawless model, a body with outlines of perfect beauty, the carnations—Ah! where does she live?" he cried, breaking in upon himself, "the undiscoverable Venus of the olden time, for whom we have sought so often, only to find the scattered gleams of her beauty here and there? Oh! to behold once and for one moment, nature grown perfect and divine, the ideal at last, I would give all that I possess. Nay, beauty divine, I would go to seek thee in the dim land of the dead; like Orpheus, I would go down into the hades of art to bring back the life of art from among the shadows of death."

"We can go now," said Porbus to Poussin. "He neither hears nor sees us any longer."

"Let us go to his studio," said young Poussin, wondering greatly.

"Oh! the old fox takes care that no one shall enter it. His treasures are so carefully guarded that it is impossible for us to come at them. I have not waited for your suggestion and your fancy to attempt to lay hands on this mystery by force."

"So there is a mystery?"

"Yes," answered Porbus. "Old Frenhofer is the only pupil Mabuse would take. Frenhofer became the painter's friend, deliverer, and father; he sacrificed the greater part



of his fortune to enable Mabuse to indulge in riotous extravagance, and in return Mabuse bequeathed to him the secret of relief, the power of giving to his figures the wonderful life, the flower of nature, the eternal despair of art, the secret which Mabuse knew so well that one day when he had sold the flowered brocade suit in which he should have appeared at the Entry of Charles V., he accompanied his master in a suit of paper painted to resemble the brocade. The peculiar richness and splendor of the stuff struck the Emperor; he complimented the old drunkard's patron on the artist's appearance, and so the trick was brought to light. Frenhofer is a passionate enthusiast, who sees above and beyond other painters. He has meditated profoundly on color, and the absolute truth of line; but by the way of much research he has come to doubt the very existence of the objects of his search. He says, in moments of despondency, that there is no such thing as drawing, and that by means of lines we can only reproduce geometrical figures; but that is overshooting the mark; for by outline and shadow you can reproduce form without any color at all, which shows that our art, like nature, is composed of an infinite number of elements. Drawing gives you the skeleton, the anatomical framework, and color puts the life into it; but life without the skeleton is even more incomplete than a skeleton without life. But there is something else truer still, and it is this—for painters, practice and observation are everything; and when theories and political ideas begin to quarrel with the brushes, the end is doubt, as has happened with our good friend, who is half-crack-brained enthusiast, half-painter. A sublime painter! but, unluckily for him, he was born to riches, and so he has leisure to follow his fancies. Do not you follow his example! Work! painters have no business to think, except with brush in hand."

"We will find a way into his studio!" cried Poussin confidently. He had ceased to heed Porbus' remarks. The other

smiled at the young painter's enthusiasm, asked him to come to see him again, and they parted.

Nicolas Poussin went slowly back to the Rue de la Harpe, and passed the modest hostelry where he was lodging without noticing it. A feeling of uneasiness prompted him to hurry up the crazy staircase till he reached a room at the top, a quaint, airy recess under the steep, high-pitched roof common among houses in old Paris. In the one dingy window of the place sat a young girl, who sprang up at once when she heard some one at the door; it was the prompting of love; she had recognized the painter's touch on the latch.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"The matter is—— is—— Oh! I have felt that I am a painter! Until to-day I have had doubts, but now I believe in myself! There is the making of a great man in me! Never mind, Gillette, we shall be rich and happy! There is gold at the tips of those brushes——"

He broke off suddenly. The joy faded from his powerful and earnest face as he compared his vast hopes with his slender resources. The walls were covered with sketches in chalk on sheets of common paper. There were but four canvases in the room. Colors were very costly, and the young painter's palette was almost bare. Yet in the midst of his poverty he possessed and was conscious of the possession of inexhaustible treasures of the heart, of a devouring genius equal to all the tasks that lay before him.

He had been brought to Paris by a nobleman among his friends, or perchance by the consciousness of his powers; and in Paris he had found a mistress, one of those noble and generous souls who choose to suffer by a great man's side, who share his struggles and strive to understand his fancies, accepting their lot of poverty and love as bravely and dauntlessly as other women will set themselves to bear the burden of riches and make a parade of their insensibility. The smile that stole over Gillette's lips filled the garret with golden

light, and rivaled the brightness of the sun in heaven. The sun, moreover, does not always shine in heaven, whereas Gillette was always in the garret, absorbed in her passion, occupied by Poussin's happiness and sorrow, consoling the genius which found an outlet in love before art engrossed it.

"Listen, Gillette. Come here."

The girl obeyed joyously, and sprang upon the painter's knee. Hers was perfect grace and beauty, and the loveliness of spring; she was adorned with all luxuriant fairness of outward form, lighted up by the glow of a fair soul within.

"Oh! God," he cried; "I shall never dare to tell her——"

"A secret?" she cried; "I must know it!"

Poussin was absorbed in his dreams.

"Do tell it to me!"

"Gillette, poor beloved heart!"

"Oh! do you want something of me?"

"Yes."

"If you wish me to sit once more for you as I did the other day," she continued with playful petulance, "I will never consent to do such a thing again, for your eyes say nothing all the while. You do not think of me at all, and yet you look at me——"

"Would you rather have me draw another woman?"

"Perhaps—if she were very ugly," she said.

"Well," said Poussin gravely, "and if, for the sake of my fame to come, if to make me a great painter, you must sit to some one else?"

"You may try me," she said; "you know quite well that I would not."

Poussin's head sank on her breast; he seemed to be overpowered by some intolerable joy or sorrow.

"Listen," she cried, plucking at the sleeve of Poussin's threadbare doublet. "I told you, Nick, that I would lay down my life for you; but I never promised you that I in my lifetime would lay down my love,"

"Your love?" cried the young artist.

"If I showed myself thus to another, you would love me no longer, and I should feel myself unworthy of you. Obedience to your fancies was a natural and simple thing, was it not! Even against my own will, I am glad and even proud to do thy dear will. But for another, out upon it!"

"Forgive me, my Gillette," said the painter, falling upon his knees; "I would rather be beloved than famous. You are fairer than success and honors. There; fling the pencils away, and burn these sketches! I have made a mistake. I was meant to love and not to paint. Perish art and all its secrets!"

Gillette looked admiringly at him, in an ecstasy of happiness! She was triumphant; she felt instinctively that art was laid aside for her sake, and flung like a grain of incense at her feet.

"Yet he is only an old man," Poussin continued; "for him you would be a woman, and nothing more. You—so perfect!"

"I must love you indeed!" she cried, ready to sacrifice even love's scruples to the lover who had given up so much for her sake; "but I should bring about my own ruin. Ah! to ruin myself, to lose everything for you!—It is a very glorious thought! Ah! but you will forget me. Oh! what evil thought is this that has come to you? How can you ask such a thing of me?"

"I love you, and yet I thought of it," he said, with something like remorse. "Am I so base a wretch?"

"Let us consult Père Hardouin," she said.

"No, no! let it be a secret between us."

"Very well; I will do it. But you must not be there," she said. "Stay at the door with your dagger in your hand; and if I call, rush in and kill the painter."

Poussin forgot everything but art. He held Gillette tightly in his arms.

"He loves me no longer!" thought Gillette when she was alone. She repented of her resolution already.

But to these misgivings there soon succeeded a sharper pain, and she strove to banish a hideous thought that arose in her own heart. It seemed to her that her own love had grown less already, with a vague suspicion that the painter had fallen somewhat in her eyes.

## II. CATHERINE LESCAULT.

Three months after Poussin and Porbus met, the latter went to see Master Frenhofer. The old man had fallen a victim to one of those profound and spontaneous fits of discouragement that are caused, according to medical logicians, by indigestion, flatulence, fever, or enlargement of the spleen; or, if you take the opinion of the Spiritualists, by the imperfections of our moral nature. The good man had simply overworked himself in putting the finishing touches to his mysterious picture. He was lounging in a huge carved oak chair, covered with black leather, and did not change his listless attitude, but glanced at Porbus like a man who has settled down into low spirits.

"Well, master," said Porbus, "was the ultramarine bad that you sent for to Bruges? Is the new white difficult to grind? Is the oil poor, or are the brushes recalcitrant?"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "for a moment I thought that my work was finished; but I am sure that I am mistaken in certain details, and I cannot rest until I have cleared my doubts. I am thinking of traveling. I am going to Turkey, to Greece, to Asia, in quest of a model, so as to compare my picture with the different living forms of nature. Perhaps," and a smile of contentment stole over his face, "perhaps I

have nature herself up there. At times I am half-afraid that a breath may waken her, and that she will escape me."

He rose to his feet as if to set out at once.

"Aha!" said Porbus, "I have come just in time to save you the trouble and expense of a journey."

"What?" asked Frenhofer in amazement.

"Young Poussin is loved by a woman of incomparable and flawless beauty. But, dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, at the least you ought to let us see your work."

The old man stood motionless and completely dazed.

"What!" he cried piteously at last, "show you my creation, my bride? Rend the veil that has kept my happiness sacred? It would be an infamous profanation. For ten years I have lived with her; she is mine, mine alone; she loves me. Has she not smiled at me, at each stroke of the brush upon the canvas? She has a soul—the soul that I have given her. She would blush if any eyes but mine should rest on her. To exhibit her! Where is the husband, the lover so vile as to bring the woman he loves to dishonor? When you paint a picture for the court, you do not put your whole soul into it; to courtiers you sell lay figures duly colored. My painting is no painting, it is a sentiment, a passion. She was born in my studio, there she must dwell in maiden solitude, and only when clad can she issue thence. Poetry and women only lay the last veil aside for their lovers. Have we Rafael's model, Ariosto's Angelica, Dante's Beatrice? Nay, only their form and semblance. But this picture, locked away above in my studio, is an exception in our art. It is not a canvas, it is a woman—a woman with whom I talk. I share her thoughts, her tears, her laughter. Would you have me fling aside these ten years of happiness like a cloak? Would you have me cease at once to be father, lover, and creator? She is not a creature, but a creation.

"Bring your young painter here. I will give him my treasures; I will give him pictures by Correggio and Michel

Angelo and Titian ; I will kiss his footprints in the dust ; but—make him my rival ! Shame on me. Ah ! ah ! I am a lover first, and then a painter. Yes, with my latest sigh I could find strength to burn my *Belle Noiseuse* ; but—compel her to endure the gaze of a stranger, a young man and a painter ! Ah ! no, no ! I would kill him on the morrow who should sully her with a glance ! Nay, you, my friend, I would kill you with my own hands in a moment if you did not kneel in reverence before her ! Now, will you have me submit my idol to the careless eyes and senseless criticisms of fools ? Ah ! love is a mystery ; it can only live hidden in the depths of the heart. You say, even to your friend, ‘Behold her whom I love,’ and there is an end of love.”

The old man seemed to have grown young again ; there were light and life in his eyes and a faint flush of red in his pale face. His hands shook. Porbus was so amazed by the passionate vehemence of Frenhofer’s words that he knew not what to reply to this utterance of an emotion as strange as it was profound. Was Frenhofer sane or mad ? Had he fallen a victim to some freak of the artist’s fancy ? or were these ideas of his produced by that strange lightheadedness which comes over us during the long travail of a work of art. Would it be possible to come to terms with this singular passion ?

Harassed by all these doubts, Porbus spoke—“Is it not woman for woman ?” he said. “Does not Poussin submit his mistress to your gaze ?”

“What is she ?” retorted the other. “A mistress who will be false to him sooner or later. Mine will be faithful to me forever.”

“Well, well,” said Porbus, “let us say no more about it. But you may die before you will find such flawless beauty as hers, even in Asia, and then your picture will be left unfinished.”

“Oh ! it is finished,” said Frenhofer. “Standing before it

you would think that it was a living woman lying on the velvet couch beneath the shadow of the curtains. Perfumes are burning on a golden tripod by her side. You would be tempted to lay your hand upon the tassel of the cord that holds back the curtains ; it would seem to you that you saw her breast rise and fall as she breathed ; that you beheld the living Catherine Lescault, the beautiful courtesan whom men called *La Belle Noiseuse*. And yet—if I could but be sure—then——”

“Then go to Asia,” returned Porbus, noticing a certain indecision in Frenhofer’s face. And with that Porbus made a few steps towards the door.

By that time Gillette and Nicolas Poussin had reached Frenhofer’s house. The girl drew her arm away from her lover’s as she stood on the threshold, and shrank back as if some presentiment flashed through her mind.

“Oh ! what have I come to do here ?” she asked of her lover in low vibrating tones, with her eyes fixed on his.

“Gillette, I have left you to decide ; I am ready to obey you in everything. You are my conscience and my glory. go home again ; I shall be much happier, perhaps, if you do not——”

“Am I my own when you speak to me like that ? No, no ; I am like a child—Come,” she added, seemingly with a violent effort ; “if our love dies, if I plant a long regret in my heart, your fame will be the reward of my obedience to your wishes, will it not ? Let us go in. I shall still live on as a memory on your palette ; that shall be life for me afterwards.”

The door opened, and the two lovers encountered Porbus, who was surprised by the beauty of Gillette, whose eyes were full of tears. He hurried her, trembling from head to foot, into the presence of the old painter.

“Here !” he cried, “is she not worth all the masterpieces in the world !”

Frenhofer trembled. There stood Gillette in the artless and



childlike attitude of some timid and innocent Giorgione, carried off by brigands, and confronted with a slave merchant. A shame-fast red flushed her face, her eyes drooped, her hands hung by her side, her strength seemed to have failed her, her tears protested against this outrage. Poussin cursed himself in despair that he should have brought his fair treasure from its hiding-place. The lover overcame the artist, and countless doubts assailed Poussin's heart when he saw youth dawn in the old man's eyes, as, like a painter, he discerned every line of the form hidden beneath the young girl's vesture. Then the lover's savage jealousy awoke.

"Gillette!" he cried, "let us go."

The girl turned joyously at the cry and the tone in which it was uttered, raised her eyes to his, looked at him, and fled to his arms.

"Ah! then you love me," she cried; "you love me!" and she burst into tears.

She had spirit enough to suffer in silence, but she had no strength to hide her joy.

"Oh! leave her with me for one moment," said the old painter, "and you shall compare her with my *Catherine*—yes—I consent."

Frenhofer's words likewise came from him like a lover's cry. His vanity seemed to be engaged for his semblance of womanhood; he anticipated the triumph of the beauty of his own creation over the beauty of the living girl.

"Do not give him time to change his mind!" cried Porbus, striking Poussin on the shoulder. "The flower of love soon fades, but the flower of art is immortal."

"Then am I only a woman now for him?" said Gillette. She was watching Poussin and Porbus closely.

She raised her head proudly; she glanced at Frenhofer, and her eyes flashed; then as she saw how her lover had fallen again to gazing at the portrait which he had taken at first for a Giorgione—

"Ah!" she cried; "let us go up to the studio. He never gave me such a look."

The sound of her voice recalled Poussin from his dreams.

"Old man," he said, "do you see this blade? I will plunge it into your heart at the first cry from this young girl; I will set fire to your house, and no one shall leave it alive. Do you understand?"

Nicolas Poussin scowled, every word was a menace. Gillette took comfort from the young painter's bearing, and yet more from that gesture, and almost forgave him for sacrificing her to his art and his glorious future.

Porbus and Poussin stood at the door of the studio and looked at each other in silence. At first the painter of the Saint Mary of Egypt hazarded some exclamations: "Ah! she has taken off her clothes; he told her to come into the light—he is comparing the two!" but the sight of the deep distress in Poussin's face suddenly silenced him; and though old painters no longer feel these scruples, so petty in the presence of art, he admired them because they were so natural and gracious in the lover. The young man kept his hand on the hilt of his dagger, and his ear was almost glued to the door. The two men standing in the shadow might have been conspirators waiting for the hour when they might strike down a tyrant.

"Come in, come in," cried the old man. He was radiant with delight. "My work is perfect. I can show her now with pride. Never shall painter, brushes, colors, light and canvas produce a rival for *Catherine Lescault*, the beautiful courtesan!"

Porbus and Poussin, burning with eager curiosity, hurried into a vast studio. Everything was in disorder and covered with dust, but they saw a few pictures here and there upon the wall. They stopped first of all in admiration before the life-sized figure of a woman partially draped.

"Oh! never mind that," said Frenhofer; that is a rough

daub that I made, a study, a pose, it is nothing. These are my failures," he went on, indicating the enchanting compositions upon the walls of the studio.

This scorn for such works of art struck Porbus and Poussin dumb with amazement. They looked round for the picture of which he had spoken, and could not discover it.

"Look here!" said the old man. His hair was disordered, his face aglow with a more than human exaltation, his eyes glittered, he breathed hard like a young lover frenzied by love.

"Aha!" he cried, "you did not expect to see such perfection! You are looking for a picture, and you see a woman before you. There is such depth in that canvas, the atmosphere is so true that you cannot distinguish it from the air that surrounds us. Where is art? Art has vanished, it is invisible! It is the form of a living girl that you see before you. Have I not caught the very hues of life, the spirit of the living line that defines the figure? Is there not the effect produced there like that which all natural objects present in the atmosphere about them, or fishes in the water? Do you see how the figure stands out against the background? Does it not seem to you that you could pass your hand along the back? But then for seven years I studied and watched how the daylight blends with the objects on which it falls. And the hair, the light pours over it like a flood, does it not? Ah! she breathed, I am sure that she breathed! Her breast—ah, see! Who would not fall on his knees before her? Her pulses throb. She will rise to her feet. Wait!" continued the old man, in the height of his enthusiasm.

"Do you see anything?" Poussin asked of Porbus.

"No; do you?"

"I see nothing."

The two painters left the old man to his ecstasy, and tried to ascertain whether the light that fell full upon the canvas had in some way neutralized all the effect for them. They

moved to the right and left of the picture; then they came in front, bending down and standing upright by turns.

"Yes, yes, it is really canvas," said Frenhofer, who mistook the nature of this minute investigation.

"Look! the canvas is on a stretcher, here is the easel; indeed, here are my colors, my brushes," and he took up a brush and held it out to them, all unsuspecting of their thought.

"The old Dutchman is laughing at us," said Poussin, coming once more towards the supposed picture. "I can see nothing there but confused masses of color and a multitude of fantastical lines that go to make a dead wall of paint."

"We are mistaken, look!" said Porbus.

In a corner of the canvas as they came nearer they distinguished a bare foot emerging from the chaos of color, half-tints and vague shadows that made up a dim formless fog. Its living delicate beauty held them spellbound. This fragment that had escaped an incomprehensible, slow, and gradual destruction seemed to them like the Parian marble torso of some Venus emerging from the ashes of a ruined town.

"There is a woman beneath," exclaimed Porbus, calling Poussin's attention to the coats of paint with which the old artist had overlaid and concealed his work in the quest of perfection.

Both artists turned involuntarily to Frenhofer. They began to have some understanding, vague though it was, of the ecstasy in which he lived.

"He believes it in all good faith," said Porbus.

"Yes, my friend," said the old man, rousing himself from his dreams, "it needs faith, faith in art, and you must live for long with your work to produce such a creation. What toil some of those shadows have cost me. Look! there is a faint shadow there upon the cheek beneath the eyes—if you saw that on a human face, it would seem to you that you could never

render it with paint. Do you think that that effect has not cost unheard-of toil?

"But not only so, dear Porbus. Look closely at my work, and you will understand more clearly what I was saying as to methods of modeling and outline. Look at the high-lights on the bosom, and see how by touch on touch, thickly laid on, I have raised the surface so that it catches the light itself and blends it with the lustrous whiteness of the high-lights, and how by an opposite process, by flattening the surface of the paint, and leaving no trace of the passage of the brush, I have succeeded in softening the contours of my figure and enveloping them in half-tints until the very idea of drawing, of the means by which the effect is produced, fades away, and the picture has the roundness and relief of nature. Come closer. You will see the manner of working better; at a little distance it cannot be seen. There! Just there, it is, I think, very plainly to be seen," and with the tip of his brush he pointed out a patch of transparent color to the two painters.

Porbus, laying a hand on the old artist's shoulder, turned to Poussin with a "Do you know that in him we see a very great painter?"

"He is even more of a poet than a painter," Poussin answered gravely.

"There," Porbus continued, as he touched the canvas, "lies the utmost limit of our art on earth."

"Beyond that point it loses itself in the skies," said Poussin.

"What joys lie there on that piece of canvas!" exclaimed Porbus.

The old man, deep in his own musings, smiled at the woman he alone beheld, and did not hear.

"But sooner or later he will find out that there is nothing there!" cried Poussin.

"Nothing on my canvas!" said Frenhofer, looking in turn at either painter and at his picture.

"What have you done?" muttered Porbus, turning to Poussin.

The old man clutched the young painter's arm and said, "Do you see nothing? clodpate? Huguenot! varlet! cullion! What brought you here into my studio? My good Porbus," he went on, as he turned to the painter, "are you also making a fool of me? Answer! I am your friend. Tell me, have I ruined my picture after all?"

Porbus hesitated and said nothing, but there was such intolerable anxiety in the old man's white face that he pointed to the easel.

"Look!" he said.

Frenhofer looked for a moment at his picture, and staggered back.

"Nothing! nothing! After ten years of work——"

He sat down and wept.

"So I am a dotard, a madman, I have neither talent nor power! I am only a rich man, who works for his own pleasure, and makes no progress. I have done nothing after all!"

He looked through his tears at his picture. Suddenly he rose and stood proudly before the two painters.

"By the body and blood of Christ," he cried with flashing eyes, "you are jealous! You would have me think that my picture is a failure because you want to steal her from me! Ah! I see her, I see her," he cried, "she is marvelously beautiful——"

At that moment Poussin heard the sound of weeping; Gillette was crouching forgotten in a corner. All at once the painter again became the lover. "What is it, my angel?" he asked her.

"Kill me!" she sobbed. "I must be a vile thing if I love you still, for I despise you. I admire you, and I loathe you! I love you, and I feel that I hate you even now."

While Gillette's words sounded in Poussin's ears, Frenhofer

drew a green serge covering over his *Catherine* with the sober deliberation of a jeweler who locks his drawers when he suspects his visitors to be expert thieves. He gave the two painters a profoundly astute glance that expressed to the full his suspicions and his contempt for them, saw them out of his studio with impetuous haste and in silence, until from the threshold of his house he bade them "Good-bye, my young friends!"

That farewell struck a chill of dread into the two painters. Porbus, in anxiety, went again on the morrow to see Frenhofer, and learned that he had died in the night after burning his canvases.

PARIS, *February*, 1832.



## CHRIST IN FLANDERS.

(*Christ en Flanders.*)

*To Marcelline Desbordes-Valmore, a daughter of Flanders, of whom these modern days may well be proud, I dedicate this quaint legend of old Flanders.*

DE BALZAC.

AT a dimly remote period in the history of Brabant, communication between the Island of Cadzand and the Flemish coast was kept up by a boat which carried passengers from one shore to the other. Middelburg, the chief town in the island, destined to become so famous in the annals of Protestantism, at that time only numbered some two or three hundred hearths; and the prosperous town of Ostend was an obscure haven, a straggling village where pirates dwelt in security among the fishermen and the few poor merchants who lived in the place.

But though the town of Ostend consisted altogether of some score of houses and three hundred cottages, huts or hovels built of the driftwood of wrecked vessels, it nevertheless rejoiced in the possession of a governor, a garrison, a forked gibbet, a convent, and a burgomaster; in short, in all the institutions of an advanced civilization.

Who reigned over Brabant and Flanders in those days? On this point tradition is mute. Let us confess at once that this tale savours strongly of the marvelous, the mysterious, and the vague; elements which Flemish narrators have infused into a story retailed so often to gatherings of workers on winter evenings, that the versions vary widely in poetic merit and incongruity of detail. It has been told by every genera-



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tion, handed down by grandames at the fireside, narrated night and day, and the version has changed its complexion somewhat in every age. Like some great building that has suffered many modifications of successive generations of architects, some sombre weather-beaten pile, the delight of a poet, the story would drive the commentator and the industrious winnow of words, facts, and dates to despair. The narrator believes in it, as all superstitious minds in Flanders likewise believe; and is not a whit wiser nor more credulous than his audience. But as it would be impossible to make a harmony of all the different renderings, here are the outlines of the story; stripped, it may be, of its picturesque quaintness, but with all its bold disregard of historical truth, and its moral teaching approved by religion—a myth, the blossom of imaginative fancy; an allegory that the wise may interpret to suit themselves. To each his own pasturage, and the task of separating the tares from the wheat.

The boat that served to carry passengers from the Island of Cadzand to Ostend was upon the point of departure; but before the skipper loosed the chain that secured the shallop to the little jetty, where people embarked, he blew a horn several times, to warn late-comers, this being his last journey that day. Night was falling. It was scarcely possible to see the coast of Flanders by the dying fires of the sunset, or to make out upon the hither shore any forms of belated passengers hurrying along the wall of the dykes that surrounded the open country, or among the tall reeds of the marshes. The boat was full.

“What are you waiting for? Let us put off!” they cried.

Just at that moment a man appeared a few paces from the jetty, to the surprise of the skipper, who had heard no sound of footsteps. The traveler seemed to have sprung up from the earth, like a peasant who had laid himself down on the ground to wait till the boat should start, and had slept till the

sound of the horn awakened him. Was he a thief? or some one belonging to the custom-house or the police?

As soon as the man appeared on the jetty to which the boat was moored, seven persons who were standing in the stern of the shallop hastened to sit down on the benches, so as to leave no room for the new-comer. It was the swift and instinctive working of the aristocratic spirit, an impulse of exclusiveness that comes from the rich man's heart. Four of the seven personages belonged to the most aristocratic families in Flanders. First among them was a young knight with two beautiful greyhounds; his long hair flowed from beneath a jeweled cap; he clanked his gilded spurs, curled the ends of his mustache from time to time with a swaggering grace, and looked round disdainfully on the rest of the crew. A high-born damsel, with a falcon on her wrist, only spoke with her mother or with a churchman of high rank, who was evidently a relation. All these persons made a great deal of noise, and talked among themselves as though there were no one else in the boat; yet close beside them sat a man of great importance in the district, a stout burgher of Bruges, wrapped about with a vast cloak. His servant, armed to the teeth, had set down a couple of bags filled with gold at his side. Next to the burgher came a man of learning, a doctor of the University of Louvain, who was traveling with his clerk. This little group of folk, who looked contemptuously at each other, was separated from the passengers in the forward part of the boat by the bench of rowers.

The belated traveler glanced about him as he stepped on board, saw that there was no room for him in the stern, and went to the bow in quest of a seat. They were all poor people there. At first sight of the bareheaded man in the brown camlet coat and trunk-hose, and plain stiff linen collar, they noticed that he wore no ornaments, carried no cap nor bonnet in his hand, and had neither sword nor purse at his girdle, and one and all took him for a burgomaster sure of his

authority, a worthy and kindly burgomaster like so many a Fleming of old times, whose homely features and characters have been immortalized by Flemish painters. The poorer passengers, therefore, received him with demonstrations of respect that provoked scornful tittering at the other end of the boat. An old soldier, inured to toil and hardship, gave up his place on the bench to the new-comer, and seated himself on the edge of the vessel, keeping his balance by planting his feet against one of those transverse beams, like the backbone of a fish, that hold the planks of a boat together. A young mother, who bore her baby in her arms, and seemed to belong to the working class in Ostend, moved aside to make room for the stranger. There was neither servility nor scorn in her manner of doing this; it was a simple sign of the good-will by which the poor, who know by long experience the value of a service and the warmth that fellowship brings, give expression to the openheartedness and the natural impulses of their souls; so artlessly do they reveal their good qualities and their defects. The stranger thanked her by a gesture full of gracious dignity, and took his place between the young mother and the old soldier. Immediately behind him sat a peasant and his son, a boy ten years of age. A beggar woman, old, wrinkled and clad in rags, was crouching, with her almost empty wallet, on a great coil of rope that lay in the prow. One of the rowers, an old sailor, who had known her in the days of her beauty and prosperity, had let her come in "for the love of God," in the beautiful phrase that the common people use. )

"Thank you kindly, Thomas," the old woman had said. "I will say two *Paters* and two *Aves* for you in my prayers to-night."

The skipper blew his horn for the last time, looked along the silent shore, flung off the chain, ran along the side of the boat, and took up his position at the helm. He looked at the sky, and as soon as they were out in the open sea, he shouted to the men: "Pull away, pull with all your might! The sea

is smiling at a squall, the witch! I can feel the swell by the way the rudder works, and the storm in my wounds."

The nautical phrases, unintelligible to ears unused to the sound of the sea, seemed to put fresh energy into the oars; they kept time together, the rhythm of the movement was still even and steady, but quite unlike the previous manner of rowing; it was as if a cantering horse had broken into a gallop. The gay company seated in the stern amused themselves by watching the brawny arms, the tanned faces, and sparkling eyes of the rowers, the play of the tense muscles, the physical and mental forces that were being exerted to bring them for a trifling toll across the channel. So far from pitying the rowers' distress, they pointed out the men's faces to each other, and laughed at the grotesque expressions on the faces of the crew who were straining every muscle; but in the fore part of the boat the soldier, the peasant, and the old beggar woman watched the sailors with the sympathy naturally felt by toilers who live by the sweat of their brow and know the rough struggle, the strenuous excitement of effort. These folk, moreover, whose lives were spent in the open air, had all seen the warnings of danger in the sky, and their faces were grave. The young mother rocked her child, singing an old hymn of the Church for a lullaby.

"If we ever get there at all," the soldier remarked to the peasant, "it will be because the Almighty is bent on keeping us alive."

"Ah! He is the Master," said the old woman, "but I think it will be His good pleasure to take us to Himself. Just look at that light down there——" and she nodded her head towards the sunset as she spoke.

Streaks of fiery red glared from behind the masses of crimson-flushed brown cloud that seemed about to unloose a furious gale. There was a smothered murmur of the sea, a moaning sound that seemed to come from the depths, a low warning growl, such as a dog gives when he only means mis-

chief as yet. After all, Ostend was not far away. Perhaps painting, like poetry, could not prolong the existence of the picture presented by sea and sky at that moment beyond the time of its actual duration. Art demands vehement contrasts, wherefore artists usually seek out nature's most striking effects, doubtless because they despair of rendering the great and glorious charm of her daily moods; yet the human soul is often stirred as deeply by her calm as by her emotion, and by silence as by storm.

For a moment no one spoke on board the boat. Every one watched that sea and sky, either with some presentiment of danger, or because they felt the influence of the religious melancholy that takes possession of nearly all of us at the close of day, the hour of prayer, when all nature is hushed save for the voices of the bells. The sea gleamed pale and wan, but its hues changed, and the surface took all the colors of steel. The sky was almost overspread with livid gray, but down in the west there were long narrow bars like streaks of blood; while lines of bright light in the eastern sky, sharp and clean as if drawn by the tip of a brush, were separated by folds of cloud, like the wrinkles on an old man's brow. The whole scene made a background of ashen grays and half-tints, in strong contrast to the bale-fires of the sunset. If written language might borrow of spoken language some of the bold figures of speech invented by the people, it might be said with the soldier that "the weather had been routed," or, as the peasant would say, "the sky glowered like an executioner." Suddenly a wind arose from the quarter of the sunset, and the skipper, who never took his eyes off the sea, saw the swell on the horizon line, and cried—

"Stop rowing!"

The sailors stopped immediately, and let their oars lie on the water.

"The skipper is right," said Thomas coolly. A great wave caught up the boat, carried it high on its crest, only to plunge

it, as it were, into the trough of the sea that seemed to yawn for them. At this mighty upheaval, this sudden outbreak of the wrath of the sea, the company in the stern turned pale, and sent up a terrible cry.

"We are lost!"

"Oh, not yet!" said the skipper calmly.

As he spoke, the clouds immediately above their heads were torn asunder by the vehemence of the wind. The gray mass was rent and scattered east and west with ominous speed, a dim uncertain light from the rift in the sky fell full upon the boat, and the travelers beheld each other's faces. All of them, the noble and the wealthy, the sailors and the poor passengers alike, were amazed for a moment by the appearance of the last comer. His golden hair, parted upon his calm, serene forehead, fell in thick curls about his shoulders; and his face, sublime in its sweetness and radiant with divine love, stood out against the surrounding gloom. He had no contempt for death; he knew that he should not die. But if at the first the company in the stern forgot for a moment the implacable fury of the storm that threatened their lives, selfishness and their habits of life soon prevailed again.

"How lucky that stupid burgomaster is not to see the risks we are all running! He is just like a dog, he will die without a struggle," said the doctor.

He had scarcely pronounced this highly judicious dictum when the storm unloosed all its legions. The wind blew from every quarter of the heavens, the boat spun round like a top, and the sea broke in.

"Oh! my poor child! My poor child!—Who will save my baby?" the mother cried in a heartrending voice.

"You yourself will save it," the stranger said.

The thrilling tones of that voice went to the young mother's heart and brought hope with them; she heard the gracious words through all the whistling of the wind and the shrieks of the passengers.

"Holy Virgin of Good Help, who art at Antwerp, I promise thee a thousand pounds of wax and a statue, if thou wilt rescue me from this!" cried the burgher, kneeling upon his bags of gold.

"The Virgin is no more at Antwerp than she is here," was the doctor's comment on this appeal.

"She is in heaven," said a voice that seemed to come from the sea.

"Who said that?"

"'Tis the devil!" exclaimed the servant. "He is scoffing at the Virgin of Antwerp."

"Let us have no more of your Holy Virgin at present," the skipper cried to the passengers. "Put your hands to the scoops and bale the water out of the boat. And the rest of you," he went on, addressing the sailors, "pull with all your might! Now is the time; in the name of the devil who is leaving you in this world, be your own Providence! Every one knows that the channel is fearfully dangerous; I have been to and fro across it these thirty years. Am I facing a storm for the first time to-night?"

He stood at the helm, and looked, as before, at his boat and at the sea and sky in turn.

"The skipper always laughs at everything," muttered Thomas.

"Will God leave us to perish along with those wretched creatures?" asked the haughty damsel of the handsome cavalier.

"No, no, noble maiden. Listen!" and he caught her by the waist and said in her ear, "I can swim; say nothing about it! I will hold you by your fair hair and bring you safely to the shore; but I can only save you."

The girl looked at her aged mother. The lady was on her knees entreating absolution of the bishop, who did not heed her. In the beautiful eyes the knight read a vague feeling of filial piety, and spoke in a smothered voice:

"Submit yourself to the will of God. If it is His pleasure to take your mother to Himself, it will doubtless be for her happiness—in the other world," he added, and his voice dropped still lower. "And for ours in this," he thought within himself.

The Dame of Rupelmonde was lady of seven fiefs beside the barony of Gávres.

The girl felt the longing for life in her heart, and for love that spoke through the handsome adventurer, a young miscreant who haunted churches in search of a prize, an heiress to marry or ready money. The bishop bestowed his benison on the waves, and bade them be calm; it was all that he could do. He thought of his concubine, and of the delicate feast with which she would welcome him; perhaps at that very moment she was bathing, perfuming herself, robing herself in velvet, fastening her necklace and her jeweled clasps, and the perverse bishop so far from thinking of the power of Holy Church, of his duty to comfort Christians and exhort them to trust in God, that worthy's regrets and lover's sighs mingled with the holy words of the breviary. By the dim light that shone on the pale faces of the company, it was possible to see their differing expressions as the boat was lifted high in air by a wave, to be cast back into the dark depths; the shallop quivered like a fragile leaf, the plaything of the north wind in the autumn; the hull creaked, it seemed ready to go to pieces. Fearful shrieks went up, followed by an awful silence.

There was a strange difference between the behavior of the folk in the bow and that of the rich or great people at the other end of the boat. The young mother clasped her infant tightly to her breast every time that a great wave threatened to engulf the fragile vessel; but she clung to the hope that the stranger's words had set in her heart. Each time that her eyes turned to his face she drew fresh faith at the sight, the strong faith of a helpless woman, a mother's faith. She lived by that divine promise, the loving words from his lips; the



simple creature waited trustingly for them to be fulfilled, and scarcely feared the danger any longer.

The soldier, holding fast to the vessel's side, never took his eyes off the strange visitor. He copied on his own rough and swarthy features the imperturbability of the other's face, applying to this task the whole strength of a will and intelligence but little corrupted in the course of a life of mechanical and passive obedience. So emulous was he of a calm and tranquil courage greater than his own, that at last, perhaps unconsciously, something of that mysterious nature passed into his own soul. His admiration became an instinctive zeal for this man, a boundless love for and belief in him, such a love as soldiers feel for their leader when he has the power of swaying other men, when the halo of victories surrounds him, and the magical fascination of genius is felt in all that he does. The poor outcast was murmuring to herself—

“Ah! miserable wretch that I am! Have I not suffered enough to expiate the sins of my youth? Ah! wretched woman, why did you lead the gay life of a frivolous Frenchwoman? why did you devour the goods of God with churchmen, the substance of the poor with extortioners and fleecers of the poor? Oh! I have sinned indeed! Oh, my God! my God! let me finish my time in hell here in this world of misery.” And again she cried, “Holy Virgin, Mother of God, have pity upon me!”

“Be comforted, mother. God is not a Lombard usurer. I may have killed people good and bad at random in my time, but I am not afraid of the resurrection.”

“Ah! Master Lancepesade, how happy those fair ladies are, to be so near to a bishop, a holy man! They will get absolution for their sins,” said the old woman. “Oh! if I could only hear a priest say to me, ‘Thy sins are forgiven!’ I should believe it then.”

The stranger turned towards her, and the goodness in his face made her tremble.

"Have faith," he said, "and you will be saved."

"May God reward you, good sir," she answered. "If what you say is true, I will go on pilgrimage barefooted to Our Lady of Loretto to pray to her for you and for me."

The two peasants, father and son, were silent, patient, and submissive to the will of God, like folk whose wont it is to fall in instinctively with the ways of nature like cattle. At the one end of the boat stood riches, pride, learning, debauchery, and crime—human society, such as art and thought and education and worldly interests and laws have made it; and at this end there was terror and wailing, innumerable different impulses all repressed by hideous doubts—at this end, and at this only, the agony of fear.

Above all these human lives stood a strong man, the skipper; no doubts assailed him, the chief, the king, the fatalist among them. He was trusting in himself rather than in Providence, crying, "Bale away!" instead of "Holy Virgin," defying the storm, in fact, and struggling with the sea like a wrestler.

But the helpless poor at the other end of the wherry! The mother rocking on her bosom the little one who smiled at the storm; the woman once so frivolous and gay, and now tormented with bitter remorse; the old soldier covered with scars, a mutilated life the sole reward of his unflagging loyalty and faithfulness. This veteran could scarcely count on the morsel of bread soaked in tears to keep the life in him, yet he was always ready to laugh, and went his way merrily, happy when he could drown his glory in the depths of a pot of beer, or could tell tales of the wars to the children who admired him, leaving his future with a light heart in the hands of God. Lastly, there were the two peasants, used to hardships and toil, labor incarnate, the labor by which the world lives. These simple folk were indifferent to thought and its treasures, ready to sink them all in a belief; and their

faith was but so much the more vigorous because they had never disputed about it nor analyzed it. Such a nature is a virgin soil, conscience has not been tampered with, feeling is deep and strong; repentance, trouble, love, and work have developed, purified, concentrated, and increased their force of will a hundred times, the will—the one thing in man that resembles what learned doctors call the soul.

The boat, guided by the wellnigh miraculous skill of the steersman, came almost within sight of Ostend, when, not fifty paces from the shore, she was suddenly struck by a heavy sea and capsized. The stranger with the light about his head spoke to this little world of drowning creatures—

“Those who have faith shall be saved; let them follow me!”

He stood upright, and walked with a firm step upon the waves. The young mother at once took her child in her arms, and followed at his side across the sea. The soldier, too, sprang up, saying in his homely fashion, “Ah! in the name of a pipe! I would follow *you* to the devil;” and without seeming astonished by it, he walked on the water. The old worn-out sinner, believing in the omnipotence of God, also followed the stranger.

The two peasants said to each other, “If they are walking on the sea, why should we not do as they do?” and they also arose and hastened after the others. Thomas tried to follow, but his faith tottered; he sank in the sea more than once, and arose again, but the third time he also walked on the sea. The bold steersman clung like a remora to the wreck of his boat. The miser had had faith, and had risen to go, but he tried to take his gold with him, and it was his gold that dragged him down to the bottom. The learned man had scoffed at the charlatan and at the fools who listened to him, and, when he heard the mysterious stranger propose to the passengers that they should walk on the waves, he began to laugh, and the ocean swallowed him. The girl was dragged

down into the depths by her lover. The bishop and the older lady went to the bottom, heavily laden with sins, it may be, but still more heavily laden with incredulity and confidence in idols, weighted down by devotion, into which alms-deeds and true religion entered but little.

The faithful flock, who walked with a firm step high and dry above the surge, heard all about them the dreadful whistling of the blast; great billows broke across their path, but an irresistible force cleft a way for them through the sea. These believing ones saw through the spray a dim speck of light flickering in the window of a fisherman's hut on the shore, and each one, as he pushed on bravely towards the light, seemed to hear the voice of his fellow crying, "Courage!" through all the roaring of the surf; yet no one had spoken a word—so absorbed was each by his own peril. In this way they reached the shore, and eventually found shelter in the fisherman's hut.

When they were all seated near the fisherman's fire, they looked round in vain for their guide with the light about him. The sea washed up the steersman at the base of the cliff on which the cottage stood; he was clinging with might and main to the plank as only a sailor can cling when death stares him in the face; the stranger guide went down and rescued the almost exhausted seaman; then he said, as he held out a succoring hand above the man's head—

"Good, for this once; but do not try it again; the example would be too bad."

He took the skipper on his shoulders, and carried him to the fisherman's door, knocked for admittance for the exhausted man; then, when the door of the humble refuge opened, the Saviour disappeared.

The Convent of Mercy was built for sailors on this spot, where for a long time afterwards (so it was said) the foot-prints of Jesus Christ could be seen in the sand; but in 1793, at the time of the French invasion, the monks carried away

this precious relic, that bore witness to the Saviour's last visit to earth.

There at the convent I found myself shortly after the Revolution of 1830. I was weary of life. If you had asked me the reason of my despair, I should have found it almost impossible to give it, so languid had grown the soul that was melted within me. The west wind had slackened the springs of my intelligence. A cold, gray light poured down from the heavens, and the murky clouds that passed overhead gave a boding look to the land; all these things, together with the immensity of the sea, said to me, "Die to-day or die to-morrow, still must we not die?" And then I wandered on, musing on the doubtful future, on my blighted hopes. Gnawed by these gloomy thoughts, I turned mechanically into the convent church, with the gray towers that loomed like ghosts through the sea mists. I looked round with no kindling of the imagination at the forest of columns, at the slender arches set aloft upon the leafy capitals, a delicate labyrinth of sculpture. I walked with careless eyes along the side aisles that opened out before me like vast portals, ever turning upon their hinges. It was scarcely possible to see, by the dim light of the autumn day, the sculptured grainings of the roof, the delicate and clean-cut lines of the mouldings of the graceful pointed arches. The organ pipes were mute. There was no sound save the noise of my own footsteps to awaken the mournful echoes lurking in the dark chapels. I sat down at the base of one of the four pillars that supported the tower, near the choir. Thence I could see the whole of the building. I gazed, and no ideas connected with it arose in my mind. I saw without seeing the mighty maze of pillars, the great rose windows that hung like a network suspended as by a miracle in air above the vast doorways. I saw the doors at the end of the side aisles, the aerial galleries, the stained glass windows framed in archways, divided by slender columns, fretted into

flower forms and trefoil by fine filigree work of carved stone. A dome of glass at the end of the choir sparkled as if it had been built of precious stones set cunningly. In contrast to the roof with its alternating spaces of whiteness and color, the two aisles lay to right and left in shadow so deep that the faint gray outlines of their hundred shafts were scarcely visible in the gloom. I gazed at the marvelous arcades, the scroll-work, the garlands, the curving lines, and arabesques interwoven and interlaced, and strangely lighted, until by sheer dint of gazing my perception became confused, and I stood upon the borderland between illusion and reality, taken in the snare set for the eyes, and almost light-headed by reason of the multitudinous changes of the shapes about me.

Imperceptibly a mist gathered about the carven stonework, and I only beheld it through a haze of fine golden dust, like the motes that hover in the bars of sunlight slanting through the air of a chamber. Suddenly the stone lacework of the rose windows gleamed through this vapor that had made all forms so shadowy. Every moulding, the edges of every carving, the least detail of the sculpture were dipped in silver. The sunlight kindled fires in the stained windows, their rich colors sent out glowing sparks of light. The shafts began to tremble, the capitals were gently shaken. A light shudder as of delight ran through the building, the stones were loosened in their setting, the wall-spaces swayed with graceful caution. Here and there a ponderous pier moved as solemnly as a dowager when she condescends to complete a quadrille at the close of a ball. A few slender and graceful columns, their heads adorned with wreaths of trefoil, began to laugh and dance here and there. Some of the pointed arches dashed at the tall lancet windows, which, like ladies of the Middle Ages, wore the armorial bearings of their houses emblazoned on their golden robes. The dance of the mitred arcades with the slender windows became like a fray at a tourney.

In another moment every stone in the church vibrated,

without leaving its place ; for the organ-pipes spoke, and I heard divine music mingling with the songs of angels, an unearthly harmony, accompanied by the deep notes of the bells, that boomed as the giant towers rocked and swayed on their square bases. This strange Sabbath seemed to me the most natural thing in the world ; and I, who had seen Charles X. hurled from his throne, was no longer amazed by anything. Nay, I myself was gently swaying with a see-saw movement that influenced my nerves pleasantly in a manner of which it is impossible to give any idea. Yet in the midst of this heated riot, the cathedral choir felt cold as if it were a winter day, and I became aware of a multitude of women, robed in white, silent, and impassive, sitting there. The sweet incense smoke that arose from the censers was grateful to my soul. The tall wax candles flickered. The lectern, gay as a chanter undone by the treachery of wine, was skipping about like a peal of Chinese bells.

Then I knew that the whole cathedral was whirling round so fast that everything appeared to be undisturbed. The colossal figure on the crucifix above the altar smiled upon me with a mingled malice and benevolence that frightened me ; I turned my eyes away, and marveled at the bluish vapor that slid across the pillars, lending to them an indescribable charm. Then some graceful women's forms began to stir on the friezes. The cherubs which upheld the heavy columns shook out their wings. I felt myself uplifted by some divine power that steeped me in infinite joy, in a sweet and languid rapture. I would have given my life, I think, to have prolonged these phantasmagoria for a little, but suddenly a shrill voice clamored in my ears—

“Awake and follow me !”

A withered woman took my hand in hers ; its icy coldness crept through every nerve. The bones of her face showed plainly through the sallow, almost olive-tinted wrinkles of the skin. The shrunken, ice-cold, old woman wore a black robe,

which she trailed in the dust, and at her throat there was something white, which I dared not examine. I could scarcely see her wan and colorless eyes, for they were fixed in a stare upon the heavens. She drew me after her along the aisles, leaving a trace of her presence in the ashes that she shook from her dress. Her bones rattled as she walked, like the bones of a skeleton; and as we went I heard behind me the tinkling of a little bell, a thin, sharp sound that rang through my head like the notes of a harmonica.

"Suffer!" she cried, "suffer! So it must be!"

We came out of the church; we went through the dirtiest streets of the town, till we came at last to a dingy dwelling, and she bade me enter in. She dragged me with her, calling to me in a harsh, tuneless voice like a cracked bell—

"Defend me! defend me!"

Together we went up a winding staircase. She knocked at a door in the darkness, and a mute, like some familiar of the Inquisition, opened to her. In another moment we stood in a room hung with ancient, ragged tapestry, amid piles of old linen, crumpled muslin, and gilded brass.

"Behold the wealth that shall endure forever!" said she.

I shuddered with horror; for just then, by the light of a tall torch and two altar candles, I saw distinctly that this woman was fresh from the graveyard. She had no hair. I turned to fly. She raised her fleshless arm and encircled me with a band of iron set with spikes, and as she raised it a cry went up all about us, the cry of millions of voices—the shouting of the dead!

"It is my purpose to make thee happy forever," she said.

"That art my son."

We were sitting before the hearth, the ashes lay cold upon it; the old shrunken woman grasped my hand so tightly in hers that I could not choose but stay. I looked fixedly at her, striving to read the story of her life from the things among which she was crouching. Had she indeed any life in her?



It was a mystery. Yet I saw plainly that once she must have been young and beautiful ; fair, with all the charm of simplicity, perfect as some Greeek statue, with the brow of a vestal.

“ Ah ! ah ! ” I cried, “ now [I know thee ! Miserable woman, why has thou prostituted thyself ? In the age of thy passions, in the time of thy prosperity, the grace and purity of thy youth were forgotten. Forgetful of thy heroic devotion, thy pure life, thy abundant faith, thou didst resign thy primitive power and thy spiritual supremacy for fleshly power. Thy linen vestments, thy couch of moss, the cell in the rock, bright with rays of the Light Divine, were forsaken ; thou hast sparkled with diamonds, and shone with the glitter of luxury and pride. Then, grown bold and insolent, seizing and overturning all things in thy course like a courtesan eager for pleasure in her days of splendor, thou has steeped thyself in blood like some queen stupefied by empery. Dost thou not remember to have been dull and heavy at times, and the sudden marvelous lucidity of other moments ; as when art emerges from an orgy ? Oh ! poet, painter, and singer, lover of splendid ceremonies and protector of the arts, was thy friendship for art perchance a caprice, that so thou shouldst sleep beneath magnificent canopies ? Was there not a day when, in thy fantastic pride, though chastity and humility were prescribed to thee, thou hadst brought all things beneath thy feet, and set thy foot on the necks of princes ; when earthly dominion, and wealth, and the mind of man bore thy yoke. Exulting in the abasement of humanity, joying to witness the uttermost lengths to which man's folly would go, thou hast bidden thy lovers walk on all fours, and required of them their lands and wealth, nay, even their wives if they were worth aught to thee. Thou hast devoured millions of men without a cause ; thou hast flung away lives like sand blown by the wind from west to east. Thou hast come down from the heights of thought to sit among the kings of men. Woman ! instead of comforting men, thou hast tormented

and afflicted them ! Knowing that thou couldst ask and have, thou hast demanded—blood ! A little flour surely should have contented thee, accustomed as thou hadst been to live on bread and to mingle water with thy wine. Unlike all others in all things, formerly thou wouldst bid thy lovers fast, and they obeyed. Why should thy fancies have led thee to require things impossible ? Why, like a courtesan spoiled by her lovers, hast thou doted on follies, and left those undeceived who sought to explain and justify all thy errors ? Then came the days of thy later passions, terrible like the love of a woman of forty years, with a fierce cry thou hast sought to clasp the whole universe in one last embrace—and thy universe recoiled from thee !

“ Then old men succeeded to thy young lovers ; decrepitude came to thy feet and made thee hideous. Yet, even then, men with the eagle power of vision said to thee in a glance, ‘ Thou shalt perish ingloriously, because thou hast fallen away, because thou hast broken the vows of thy maidenhood. The angel with peace written on her forehead, who should have shed light and joy along her path, has been a Messalina, delighting in the circus, in debauchery, and abuse of power. The days of thy virginity cannot return ; henceforward thou shalt be subject to a master. Thy hour has come ; the hand of death is upon thee. Thy heirs believe that thou art rich ; they will kill thee and find nothing. Yet try at least to fling away this raiment no longer in fashion ; be once more as in the days of old !—Nay, thou art dead, and by thine own deed ! ’

“ Is not this thy story ? ” I concluded with, “ Decrepit, toothless, shivering crone, now forgotten, going thy ways without so much as a glance from passers-by ! Why art thou still alive ? What doest thou in that beggar’s garb, uncomely and desired of none ? Where are thy riches ?—for what were they spent ? Where are thy treasures ?—what great deeds hast thou done ? ”

At this demand, the shriveled woman raised her bony form,

flung off her rags, and grew tall and radiant, smiling as she broke forth from the dark chrysalis sheath. Then, like a butterfly, this diaphanous creature emerged, fair and youthful, clothed in white linen, an Indian from creation issuing her palms. Her golden hair rippled over her shoulders, her eyes glowed, a bright mist clung about her, a ring of gold hovered above her head, she shook the flaming blade of a sword towards the spaces of heaven.

"See and believe!" she cried.

And suddenly I saw, afar off, many thousands of cathedrals like the one that I had just quitted; but these were covered with pictures and with frescoes, and I heard them echo with entrancing music. Myriads of human creatures flocked to these great buildings, swarming about them like ants on an ant-heap. Some were eager to rescue books from oblivion or to copy manuscripts, others were helping the poor, but nearly all were studying. Up above this countless multitude rose giant statues that they had erected in their midst, and by the gleams of a strange light from some luminary as powerful as the sun I read the inscriptions on the bases of the statues—Science, History, Literature.

The light died out. Again I faced the young girl. Gradually she slipped into the dreary sheath, into the ragged scar-cloths, and became an aged woman again. Her familiar brought her a little dust, and she stirred it into the ashes of her chafing-dish, for the weather was cold and stormy; and then he lighted for her, whose palaces had been lit with thousands of wax-tapers, a little cresset, that she might see to read her prayers through the hours of night.

"There is no faith left in the earth!" she said.

In such a perilous plight did I behold the fairest and the greatest, the truest and most life-giving of all powers.

"Wake up, sir, the doors are just about to be shut," said a hoarse voice. I turned and beheld the beadle's ugly counte-

nance ; the man was shaking me by the arm, and the cathedral lay wrapped in shadows as a man is wrapped in his cloak.

"Belief," I said to myself, "is life ! I have just witnessed the funeral of a monarchy, now we must defend the church."

PARIS, *February*, 1831.



## MELMOTH RECONCILED.

(*Melmoth réconcilié.*)

*To Monsieur le Général Baron de Pommereul, a token of the friendship between our fathers, which survives in their sons.*

DE BALZAC.

THERE is a special variety of human nature obtained in the social kingdom by a process analogous to that of the gardener's craft in the vegetable kingdom, to wit, by the forcing-house—a species of hybrid which can be raised neither from seed nor from slips. This product is known as the cashier, an anthropomorphous growth, watered by religious doctrine, trained up in the fear of the guillotine, pruned by vice, to flourish on a third floor with an estimable wife by his side and an uninteresting family. The number of cashiers in Paris must always be a problem for the physiologist. Has any one as yet been able to state correctly the terms of the proportion sum wherein the cashier figures as the unknown  $x$ ? Where will you find the man who shall live with wealth, like a cat with a caged mouse? This man, for further qualification, shall be capable of sitting boxed in behind an iron grating for seven or eight hours a day during seven eighths of the year, perched upon a cane-seated chair in a space as narrow as a lieutenant's cabin on board a man-of-war. Such a man must be able to defy anchylosis of the knee and thigh joints; he must have a soul above meanness, in order to live meanly; must lose all relish for money by dint of handling it. Demand this peculiar specimen of any creed, educational system, school, or institution you please, and select Paris, that city of fiery ordeals and branch establishment of hell, as the soil in which to plant the

said cashier. So be it. Creeds, schools, institutions, and moral systems, all human rules and regulations, great and small, will, one after another, present much the same face that an intimate friend turns upon you when you ask him to lend you a thousand francs. With a dolorous dropping of the jaw, they indicate the guillotine, much as your friend aforesaid will furnish you with the address of the money-lender, pointing you to one of the hundred gates by which a man comes to the last refuge of the destitute.

Yet nature has her freaks in the making of a man's mind; she indulges herself and makes a few honest folk now and again, and now and then a cashier.

Wherefore, that race of corsairs whom we dignify with the title of bankers, the gentry who take out a license for which they pay a thousand crowns, as the privateer takes out his letters of marque, hold these rare products of the incubations of virtue in such esteem that they confine them in cages in their counting-houses, much as governments procure and maintain specimens of strange beasts at their own charges.

If the cashier is possessed of an imagination or of a fervid temperament; if, as will sometimes happen to the most complete cashier, he loves his wife, and that wife grows tired of her lot, has ambitions, or merely some vanity in her composition, the cashier is undone. Search the chronicles of the counting-house. You will not find a single instance of a cashier attaining *a position*, as it is called. They are sent to the hulks; they go to foreign parts; they vegetate on a second floor in the Rue Saint-Louis among the market gardens of the Marais. Some day, when the cashiers of Paris come to a sense of their real value, a cashier will be hardly obtainable for money. Still, certain it is that there are people who are fit for nothing but to be cashiers, just as the bent of a certain order of mind inevitably makes for rascality. But, oh marvel of our civilization! Society

rewards virtue with an income of a hundred louis in old age, a dwelling on a second floor, bread sufficient, occasional new bandana handkerchiefs, an elderly wife and her offspring.

So much for virtue. But for the opposite course, a little boldness, a faculty for keeping on the windward side of the law, as Turenne outflanked Montécuculli, and society will sanction the theft of millions, shower ribands upon the thief, cram him with honors, and smother him with consideration.

Government, moreover, works harmoniously with this profoundly illogical reasoner—society. Government levies a conscription on the young intelligence of the kingdom at the age of seventeen or eighteen, a conscription of precocious power. Great ability is prematurely exhausted by excessive brain-work before it is sent up to be submitted to a process of selection. Nurserymen sort and select seeds in much the same way. To this process the government brings professional appraisers of talent, men who can assay brains as experts assay gold at the Mint. Five hundred such heads, set afire with hope, are sent up annually by the most progressive portion of the population ; and of these the government takes one-third, puts them in sacks called the *Écoles*, and shakes them up together for three years. Though every one of these young plants represents vast productive power, they are made, as one may say, into cashiers. They receive appointments ; the rank and file of engineers is made up of them ; they are employed as captains of artillery ; there is no (subaltern) grade to which they may not aspire. Finally, when these men, the pick of the youth of the nation, fattened on mathematics and stuffed with knowledge, have attained the age of fifty years, they have their reward, and receive as the price of their services the third-floor lodging, the wife and family, and all the comforts that sweeten life for mediocrity. If from among this race of dupes there should escape some five or six men of

genius, who climb the highest heights, is it not very miraculous?

This is an exact statement of the relations between talent and probity on the one hand, and government and society on the other, in an age that considers itself to be progressive. Without this prefatory explanation a recent occurrence in Paris would seem improbable; but preceded by this summing up of the situation, it will perhaps receive some thoughtful attention from minds capable of recognizing the real plague-spots of our civilization, a civilization which since 1815 has been moved by the spirit of gain rather than by principles of honor.

About five o'clock, on a dull autumn afternoon, the cashier of one of the largest banks in Paris was still at his desk, working by the light of a lamp that had been lit for some time. In accordance with the use and wont of commerce, the counting-house was in the darkest corner of the low-ceiled and far from spacious mezzanine floor, and at the very end of a passage lighted only by borrowed lights. The office doors along this corridor, each with its label, gave the place the look of a bath-house. At four o'clock the stolid porter had proclaimed, according to his orders, "The bank is closed." And by this time the departments were deserted, the letters dispatched, the clerks had taken their leave. The wives of the partners in the firm were expecting their lovers; the two bankers dining with their mistresses. Everything was in order.

The place where the strong boxes had been bedded in sheet-iron was just behind the little sanctum, where the cashier was busy. Doubtless he was balancing his books. The open front gave a glimpse of a safe of hammered iron, so enormously heavy (thanks to the science of the modern inventor) that burglars could not carry it away. The door only opened at the pleasure of those who knew its password. The



letter-lock was a warden who kept its own secret and could not be bribed; the mysterious word was an ingenious realization of the "open sesame" in the "Arabian Nights." But even this was as nothing. A man might discover the password; but unless he knew the lock's final secret, the *ultima ratio* of this gold-guarding dragon of mechanical science, it discharged a blunderbuss at his head.

The door of the room, the walls of the room, the shutters of the windows in the room, the whole place, in fact, was lined with sheet-iron a third of an inch in thickness, concealed behind the thin wooden paneling. The shutters had been closed, the door had been shut. If ever man could feel confident that he was absolutely alone, and that there was no remote possibility of being watched by prying eyes, that man was the cashier of the house of Nucingen and Company, in the Rue Saint-Lazare.

Accordingly the deepest silence prevailed in that iron cage. The fire had died out in the stove, but the room was full of that tepid warmth which produces the dull heavy-headedness and nauseous queasiness of a morning after an orgy. The stove is a mesmerist that plays no small part in the reduction of bank clerks and porters to a state of idiocy.

A room with a stove in it is a retort in which the power of strong men is evaporated; where their vitality is exhausted, and their wills enfeebled. Government offices are part of a great scheme for the manufacture of the mediocrity necessary for the maintenance of a feudal system on a pecuniary basis—and money is the foundation of the social contract. (See *Les Employés*.) The mephitic vapors in the atmosphere of a crowded room contribute in no small degree to bring about a gradual deterioration of intelligences, the brain that gives off the largest quantity of nitrogen asphyxiates the others, in the long run.

The cashier was a man of five-and-forty or thereabouts. As he sat at the table, the light from a moderator lamp shining

full on his bald head and glistening fringe of iron-gray hair that surrounded it—this baldness and the round outlines of his face made his head look very like a ball. His complexion was brick-red, a few wrinkles had gathered about his eyes, but he had the smooth, plump hands of a stout man. His blue cloth coat, a little rubbed and worn, and the creases and shininess of his trousers, traces of hard wear that the clothes-brush fails to remove, would impress a superficial observer with the idea that here was a thrifty and upright human being, sufficient of the philosopher or of the aristocrat to wear shabby clothes. But, unluckily, it is easy to find penny-wise people who will prove weak, wasteful, or incompetent in the capital things of life.

The cashier wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole, for he had been a major of dragoons in the time of the Emperor. M. de Nucingen, who had been a contractor before he became a banker, had had reason in those days to know the honorable disposition of his cashier, who then occupied a high position. Reverses of fortune had befallen the major, and the banker out of regard for him paid him five hundred francs a month. The soldier had become a cashier in the year 1813, after his recovery from a wound received at Studzianka during the retreat from Moscow, followed by six months of enforced idleness at Strasbourg, whither several officers had been transported by order of the Emperor, that they might receive skilled attention. This particular officer, Castanier by name, retired with the honorary grade of colonel, and a pension of two thousand four hundred francs.

In ten years' time the cashier had completely effaced the soldier, and Castanier inspired the banker with such trust in him that he was associated in the transactions that went on in the private office behind his little counting-house. The Baron himself had access to it by means of a secret staircase. There, matters of business were decided. It was the bolting-

room where proposals were sifted ; the privy council chamber where the reports of the money market were analyzed ; circular notes issued thence ; and, finally, the private ledger and the journal which summarized the work of all the departments were kept there.

Castanier had gone himself to shut the door which opened on to a staircase that led to the parlor occupied by the two bankers on the first floor of their hotel. This done, he had sat down at his desk again, and for a moment he gazed at a little collection of letters of credit drawn on the firm of Watschildine, of London. Then he had taken up the pen and imitated the banker's signature upon each. *Nucingen* he wrote, and eyed the forged signatures critically to see which seemed the most perfect copy.

Suddenly he looked up as if a needle had pricked him. "You are not alone !" a boding voice seemed to cry in his heart ; and indeed the forger saw a man standing at the little grated window of the counting-house, a man whose breathing was so noiseless that he did not seem to breathe at all. Castanier looked, and saw that the door at the end of the passage was wide open ; the stranger must have entered by that way.

For the first time in his life the old soldier felt a sensation of dread that made him stare open-mouthed and wide-eyed at the man before him ; and for that matter, the appearance of the apparition was sufficiently alarming even if unaccompanied by the mysterious circumstances of so sudden an entry. The rounded forehead, the harsh coloring of the long oval face, indicated quite as plainly as the cut of his clothes that the man was an Englishman, reeking of his native isles. You had only to look at the collar of his overcoat, at the voluminous cravat which smothered the crushed frills of a shirt front so white that it brought out the changeless leaden hue of an impassive face, and the thin red line of the lips that seemed made to suck the blood of corpses ; and you could guess at once at the black gaiters buttoned up to the knee, and the half-



*THE FORGER SAW A MAN STANDING AT THE LITTLE  
GRATED WINDOW.*





puritanical costume of a wealthy Englishman dressed for a walking excursion. The intolerable glitter of the stranger's eyes produced a vivid and unpleasant impression, which was only deepened by the rigid outlines of his features. The dried-up, emaciated creature seemed to carry within him some gnawing thought that consumed him and could not be appeased.

He must have digested his food so rapidly that he could doubtless eat continually without bringing any trace of color into his face or features. A tun of Tokay *vin de succession* would not have caused any faltering in that piercing glance that read men's inmost thoughts, nor dethroned the merciless reasoning faculty that always seemed to go to the bottom of things. There was something of the fell and tranquil majesty of a tiger about him.

"I have come to cash this bill of exchange, sir," he said. Castanier felt the tones of his voice thrill through every nerve with a violent shock similar to that given by a discharge of electricity.

"The safe is closed," said Castanier, in the sententious tone so usual with bank officials.

"It is open," said the Englishman, looking round the counting-house. "To-morrow will be Sunday, and I cannot wait. The amount is for five hundred thousand francs. You have the money there, and I must have it."

"But how did you come in, sir?"

The Englishman smiled. That smile frightened Castanier. No words could have replied more fully nor more peremptorily than that scornful and imperial curl of the stranger's lips. Castanier turned away, took up fifty packets, each containing ten thousand francs in bank-notes, and held them out to the stranger, receiving in exchange for them a bill accepted by the Baron de Nucingen. A sort of convulsive tremor ran through him as he saw a red gleam in the stranger's eyes when they fell on the forged signature on the letter of credit.



"It wants your signature," stammered Castanier, handing back the bill.

"Hand me your pen," answered the Englishman.

Castanier handed him the pen with which he had just committed forgery. The stranger wrote *John Melmoth*, then he returned the slip of paper and the pen to the cashier. Castanier looked at the handwriting, noticing that it sloped from right to left in the Eastern fashion, and Melmoth disappeared so noiselessly that when Castanier looked up again an exclamation broke from him, partly because the man was no longer there, partly because he felt a strange painful sensation such as our imagination might take for an effect of poison.

The pen that Melmoth had handled sent the same sickening heat through him that an emetic produces. But it seemed impossible to Castanier that the Englishman should have guessed his crime. His inward qualms he attributed to the palpitation of the heart that, according to received ideas, was sure to follow at once on such a "turn" as the stranger had given him.

"The devil take it; I am very stupid. Providence is watching over me; for if that brute had come round to see my gentleman to-morrow, my goose would have been cooked!" said Castanier, and he burned the unsuccessful attempts at forgery in the stove.

He put the bill that he meant to take with him in an envelope, and helped himself to five hundred thousand francs in French and English bank-notes from the safe, which he locked. Then he put everything in order, lit a candle, blew out the lamp, took up his hat and umbrella, and went out sedately, as usual, to leave one of the two keys of the strong room with Madame de Nucingen, in the absence of her husband the Baron.

"You are in luck, M. Castanier," said the banker's wife as he entered her room; "we have a holiday on Monday; you can go into the country, or to Soizy."

"Madame, will you be so good as to tell your husband that the bill of exchange on Watschildine, which was behind time, has just been presented? The five hundred thousand francs have been paid; so I shall not come back till noon on Tuesday."

"Good-bye, monsieur; I hope you will have a pleasant time."

"The same to you, madame," replied the old dragoon as he went out. He glanced as he spoke at a young man well known in fashionable society at that time, a M. de Rastignac, who was regarded as Madame de Nucingen's lover.

"Madame," remarked this latter, "the old boy looks to me as if he meant to play you some ill turn."

"Pshaw! impossible; he is too stupid."

"Piquizeau," said the cashier, walking into the porter's room, "what made you let anybody come up after four o'clock?"

"I have been smoking a pipe here in the doorway ever since four o'clock," said the man, "and nobody has gone into the bank. Nobody has come out either except the gentlemen——"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, upon my word and honor. Stay, though, at four o'clock M. Werbrust's friend came, a young fellow from Messrs. du Tillet & Co., in the Rue Joubert."

"All right," said Castanier, and he hurried away.

The sickening sensation of heat that he had felt when he took back the pen returned in greater intensity. "Thousand devils!" thought he, as he threaded his way along the Boulevard de Gand, "haven't I taken proper precautions? Let me think! Two clear days, Sunday and Monday, then a day of uncertainty before they begin to look for me, altogether, three days and four nights' respite. I have a couple of passports and two different disguises; is not that enough to

throw the cleverest detective off the scent? On Tuesday morning I shall draw a million francs in London before the slightest suspicion has been aroused. My debts I am leaving behind for the benefit of my creditors, who will put a 'P'\* on the bills, and I shall live comfortably in Italy for the rest of my days as the Count Ferraro. I was alone with him when he died, poor fellow, in the marsh of Zembini, and I shall slip into his skin. The deuce! the woman who is to follow after me might give them a clue! Think of an old campaigner like me infatuated enough to tie myself to a petticoat tail! Why take her? I must leave her behind. Yes, I could make up my mind to it; but—I know myself—I should be ass enough to go back for her. Still, nobody knows Aquilina. Shall I take her or leave her?"

"You will not take her!" cried a voice that filled Castanier with sickening dread. He turned sharply, and saw the Englishman.

"The devil is in it!" cried the cashier aloud.

Melmoth had passed his victim by this time; and if Castanier's first impulse had been to fasten a quarrel on a man who read his own thoughts, he was so much torn by opposing feelings that the immediate result was a temporary paralysis. When he resumed his walk he fell once more into that fever of irresolution which besets those who are so carried away by passion that they are ready to commit a crime, but have not sufficient strength of character to keep it to themselves without suffering terribly in the process. So, although Castanier had made up his mind to reap the fruits of a crime which was already half executed, he hesitated to carry out his designs. For him, as for many men of mixed character in whom weakness and strength are equally blended, the least trifling consideration determines whether they shall continue to lead blameless lives or become actively criminal. In the vast masses of men enrolled in Napoleon's armies there were many

\* Protested.

who, like Castanier, possessed the purely physical courage demanded on the battlefield, yet lacked the moral courage which makes a man as great in crime as he could have been in virtue.

The letter of credit was drafted in such terms that immediately on his arrival he might draw twenty-five thousand pounds on the firm of Watschildine, the London correspondents of the house of Nucingen. The London house had been already advised of the draft about to be made upon them; he had written to them himself. He had instructed an agent (chosen at random) to take his passage in a vessel which was to leave Portsmouth with a wealthy English family on board, who were going to Italy, and the passage-money had been paid in the name of the Count Ferraro. The smallest details of the scheme had been thought out. He had arranged matters so as to divert the search that would be made for him into Belgium and Switzerland, while he himself was at sea in the English vessel. Then, by the time that Nucingen might flatter himself that he was on the track of his late cashier, the said cashier, as the Count Ferraro, hoped to be safe in Naples. He had determined to disfigure his face in order to disguise himself the more completely, and by means of an acid to imitate the scars of smallpox. Yet, in spite of all these precautions, which surely seemed as if they must secure him complete immunity, his conscience tormented him; he was afraid. The even and peaceful life that he had led for so long had modified the morality of the camp. His life was stainless as yet; he could not sully it without a pang. So for the last time he abandoned himself to all the influences of the better self that strenuously resisted.

"Pshaw!" he said at last, at the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Montmartre, "I will take a cab after the play this evening and go out to Versailles. A postchaise will be ready for me at my old quartermaster's place. He would keep my secret even if a dozen men were standing ready to

shoot him down. The chances are all in my favor, so far as I can see; so I shall take my little Naqui with me, and I will go."

"You will not go!" exclaimed the Englishman, and the strange tones of his voice drove all the cashier's blood back to his heart.

Melmoth stepped into a tilbury which was waiting for him, and was whirled away so quickly that when Castanier looked up he saw his foe some hundred paces away from him, and before it even crossed his mind to cut off the man's retreat the tilbury was far on its way up the Boulevard Montmartre.

"Well, upon my word, there is something supernatural about this!" said he to himself. "If I were fool enough to believe in God, I should think that He had set Saint Michael on my tracks. Suppose that the devil and the police should let me go on as I please, so as to nab me in the nick of time? Did any one ever see the like! But there, this is folly——"

Castanier went along the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, slackening his pace as he neared the Rue Richer. There, on the second floor of a block of buildings which looked out upon some gardens, lived the unconscious cause of Castanier's crime—a young woman known in the quarter as Mme. de la Garde. A concise history of certain events in the cashier's past life must be given in order to explain these facts, and to give a complete presentment of the crisis when he yielded to temptation.

Mme. de la Garde said that she was a Piedmontese. No one, not even Castanier, knew her real name. She was one of those young girls who are driven by dire misery, by inability to earn a living, or by fear of starvation, to have recourse to a trade which most of them loathe, many regard with indifference, and some few follow in obedience to the laws of their constitution. But on the brink of the gulf of prostitution in Paris, the young girl of sixteen, beautiful and pure as the Madonna, had met with Castanier. The old

dragoon was too rough and homely to make his way in society, and he was tired of tramping the boulevard at night and of the kind of conquests made there by gold. For some time past he had desired to bring a certain regularity into an irregular life. He was struck by the beauty of the poor child who had drifted by chance into his arms, and his determination to rescue her from the life of the streets was half-benevolent, half-selfish, as some of the thoughts of the best of men are apt to be. Social conditions mingle elements of evil with the promptings of natural goodness of heart, and the mixture of motives underlying a man's intentions should be leniently judged. Castanier had just cleverness enough to be very shrewd where his own interests were concerned. So he concluded to be a philanthropist on either count, and at first made her his mistress.

"Hey! hey!" he said to himself, in his soldierly fashion, "I am an old wolf, and a sheep shall not make a fool of me. Castanier, old man, before you set up housekeeping, reconnoitre the girl's character for a bit, and see if she is a steady sort."

This irregular union gave the Piedmontese a status the most nearly approaching respectability among those which the world declines to recognize. During the first year she took on the pseudonym of Aquilina, one of the characters in *Venice Preserved*, which she had chanced to read. She fancied that she resembled the courtesan in face and general appearance, and in a certain precocity of heart and brain of which she was conscious. When Castanier found that her life was as well regulated and virtuous as was possible for a social outlaw, he manifested a desire that they should live as husband and wife. So she took the name of Mme. de la Garde, in order to approach, as closely as Parisian usages permit, the conditions of a real marriage. As a matter of fact, many of these unfortunate girls have one fixed idea, to be looked upon as respectable middle-class women, who lead humdrum lives of

faithfulness to their husbands ; women who would make excellent mothers, keepers of household accounts, and menders of household linen. This longing springs from a sentiment so laudable that society should take it into consideration. But society, incorrigible as ever, will assuredly persist in regarding the married woman as a corvette duly authorized by her flag and papers to go on her own course, while the woman who is a wife in all but name is a pirate and an outlaw for lack of a document. A day came when Mme. de la Garde would fain have signed herself "Mme. Castanier." The cashier was put out by this.

"So you do not love me well enough to marry me?" she said.

Castanier did not answer ; he was absorbed by his thoughts. The poor girl resigned herself to her fate. The ex-dragon was in despair. Naqui's heart softened towards him at the sight of his trouble ; she tried to soothe him, but what could she do when she did not know what ailed him ? When Naqui made up her mind to know the secret, although she never asked him a question, the cashier dolefully confessed to the existence of a Mme. Castanier. This lawful wife, a thousand times accursed, was living in a humble way in Strasbourg on a small property there ; he wrote to her twice a year, and kept the secret of her existence so well that no one suspected that he was married. The reason of this reticence ? If it is familiar to many military men who may chance to be in a like predicament, it is perhaps worth while to give the story.

Your genuine trooper (if it is allowable here to employ the word which in the army signifies a man who is destined to die as a captain) is a sort of serf, a part and parcel of his regiment, an essentially simple creature, and Castanier was marked out by nature as a victim to the wiles of mothers with grown-up daughters left too long on their hands. It was at Nancy, during one of those brief intervals of repose when the Imperial armies were not on active service abroad, that

Castanier was so unlucky as to pay some attention to a young lady with whom he danced at a *ridotto*, the provincial name for the entertainments often given by the military to the townsfolk, or *vice versà*, in garrison towns. A scheme for inveigling the gallant captain into matrimony was immediately set on foot, one of those schemes by which mothers secure accomplices in a human heart by touching all its motive springs, while they convert all their friends into fellow-conspirators.

Like all people possessed by one idea, these ladies press everything into the service of their great project, slowly elaborating their toils, much as the ant-lion excavates its funnel in the sand and lies in wait at the bottom for its victim. Suppose that no one strays, after all, into that carefully constructed labyrinth? Suppose that the ant-lion dies of hunger and thirst in her pit? Such things may be, but if any heedless creature once enters in, it never comes out. All the wires which could be pulled to induce action on the captain's part were tried; appeals were made to the secret interested motives that always come into play in such cases; they worked on Castanier's hopes and on the weaknesses and vanity of human nature. Unluckily, he had praised the daughter to her mother when he brought her back after a waltz, a little chat followed, and then an invitation in the most natural way in the world. Once introduced into the house, the dragoon was dazzled by the hospitality of a family who appeared to conceal their real wealth beneath a show of careful economy. He was skilfully flattered on all sides, and every one extolled for his benefit the various treasures there displayed. A neatly-timed dinner, served on plate loaned by an uncle, the attention shown to him by the only daughter of the house, the gossip of the town, a well-to-do sub-lieutenant who seemed likely to cut the ground from under his feet—all the innumerable snares, in short, of the provincial ant-lion were set for him, and to such good purpose, that Castanier



said five years later, "To this day I do not know how it came about ! "

The dragoon received fifteen thousand francs with the lady, who, after two years of marriage, became the ugliest and consequently the most peevish woman on earth. Luckily they had no children. The fair complexion (maintained by a Spartan regimen), the fresh, bright color in her face, which spoke of an engaging modesty, became overspread with blotches and pimples ; her figure, which had seemed so straight, grew crooked, the angel became a suspicious and shrewish creature who drove Castanier frantic. Then the fortune took to itself wings. At length the dragoon, no longer recognizing the woman whom he had wedded, left her to live on a little property at Strasbourg, until the time when it should please God to remove her to adorn paradise. She was one of those virtuous women who, for want of other occupation, would weary the life out of an angel with complainings, who pray till (if their prayers are heard in heaven) they must exhaust the patience of the Almighty, and say everything that is bad of their husbands in dove-like murmurs over a game of boston with their neighbors. When Aquilina learned all these troubles she clung still more affectionately to Castanier, and made him so happy, varying with woman's ingenuity the pleasures with which she filled his life, that all unwittingly she was the cause of the cashier's downfall.

Like many women who seem by nature destined to sound all the depths of love, Mme. de la Garde was disinterested. She asked neither for gold nor for jewelry, gave no thought to the future, lived entirely for the present and for the pleasures of the present. She accepted expensive ornaments and dresses, the carriage so eagerly coveted by women of her class, as one harmony the more in the picture of life. There was absolutely no vanity in her desire not to appear at a better advantage but to look the fairer, and, moreover, no woman could live without luxuries more cheerfully. When a man of

generous nature (and military men are mostly of this stamp) meets with such a woman, he feels a sort of exasperation at finding himself her debtor in generosity. He feels that he could stop a mail-coach to obtain money for her if he has not sufficient for her whims. He will commit a crime if so he may be great and noble in the eyes of some woman or of his special public ; such is the nature of the man. Such a lover is like a gambler who would be dishonored in his own eyes if he did not repay the sum he borrowed from a waiter in a gaming-house ; but will shrink from no crime, will leave his wife and children without a penny, and rob and murder, if so he may come to the gaming table with a full purse, and his honor remain untarnished among the frequenters of that fatal abode. So it was with Castanier.

He had begun by installing Aquilina in a modest fourth-floor dwelling, the furniture being of the simplest kind. But when he saw the girl's beauty and great qualities, when he had known inexpressible and unlooked-for happiness with her, he began to dote upon her, and longed to adorn his idol. Then Aquilina's toilet was so comically out of keeping with her poor abode, that for both their sakes it was clearly incumbent on him to move. The change swallowed up almost all Castanier's savings, for he furnished his domestic paradise with all the prodigality that is lavished on a kept mistress. A pretty woman must have everything pretty about her ; the unity of charm in the woman and her surroundings singles her out from among her sex. This sentiment of homogeneity indeed, though it has frequently escaped the attention of observers, is instinctive in human nature ; and the same prompting leads elderly spinsters to surround themselves with dreary relics of the past. But the lovely Piedmontese must have the newest and latest fashions, and all that was daintiest and prettiest in stuffs for hangings, in silks or jewelry, in fine china and other brittle and fragile wares. She asked for nothing ; but when she was called upon to make a choice, when Castanier asked

her, "Which do you like?" she would answer, "Why, this is the nicest!" Love never counts the cost, and Castanier therefore always took the "nicest."

When once the standard had been set up, there was nothing for it but everything in the household must be in conformity, from the linen, plate, and crystal through a thousand and one items of expenditure down to the pots and pans in the kitchen. Castanier had meant to "do things simply," as the saying goes, but he gradually found himself more and more in debt. One expense entailed another. The clock called for candle sconces. Fires must be lighted in the ornamental grates, but the curtains and hangings were too fresh and delicate to be soiled by smuts, so they must be replaced by patent and elaborate fireplaces, warranted to give out no smoke, recent inventions of the people who are clever at drawing up a prospectus. Then Aquilina found it so nice to run about barefooted on the carpet in her room, that Castanier must have soft carpets laid everywhere for the pleasure of playing with Naqui. A bathroom, too, was built for her, everything to the end that she might be more comfortable.

Shopkeepers, workmen, and manufacturers in Paris have a mysterious knack of enlarging a hole in a man's purse. They cannot give the price of anything upon inquiry; and as the paroxysm of longing cannot abide delay, orders are given by the feeble light of an approximate estimate of cost. The same people never send in the bills at once, but ply the purchaser with furniture till his head spins. Everything is so pretty, so charming; and every one is satisfied.

A few months later the obliging furniture dealers are metamorphosed, and reappear in the shape of alarming totals on invoices that fill the soul with their horrid clamor; they are in urgent want of the money; they are, as you may say, on the brink of bankruptcy, their tears flow, it is heartrending to hear them! And then—the gulf yawns, and gives up serried columns of figures marching four deep, when, as a

matter of fact, they should have issued innocently three by three.

Before Castanier had any idea of how much he had spent, he had arranged for Aquilina to have a carriage from a livery stable when she went out, instead of a cab. Castanier was a gourmand; he engaged an excellent cook; and Aquilina, to please him, had herself made the purchases of early fruit and vegetables, rare delicacies, and exquisite wines. But, as Aquilina had nothing of her own, these gifts of hers, so precious by reason of the thought and tact and graciousness that prompted them, were no less a drain upon Castanier's purse; he did not like his Naqui to be without money, and Naqui could not keep money in her pocket. So the table was a heavy item of expenditure for a man with Castanier's income. The ex-dragoon was compelled to resort to various shifts for obtaining money, for he could not bring himself to renounce this delightful life. He loved the woman too well to cross the freaks of the mistress. He was one of those men who, through self-love or through weakness of character, can refuse nothing to a woman; false shame overpowers them, and they rather face ruin than make the admissions: "I cannot——" "My means will not permit——" "I cannot afford——"

When, therefore, Castanier saw that if he meant to emerge from the abyss of debt into which he had plunged, he must part with Aquilina and live upon bread and water, he was so unable to do without her or to change his habits of life that daily he put off his plans of reform until the morrow. The debts were pressing, and he began by borrowing money. His position and previous character inspired confidence, and of this he took advantage to devise a system of borrowing money as he required it. Then, as the total amount of debt rapidly increased, he had recourse to those commercial inventions known as *accommodation bills*. This form of bill does not represent goods or other value received, and the first

endorser pays the amount named for the obliging person who accepts it. This species of fraud is tolerated because it is impossible to detect it, and, moreover, it is an imaginary fraud which only becomes real if payment is ultimately refused.

When at length it was evidently impossible to borrow any longer, whether because the amount of the debt was now so greatly increased, or because Castanier was unable to pay the large amount of interest on the aforesaid sums of money, the cashier saw bankruptcy before him. On making this discovery, he decided for a fraudulent bankruptcy rather than an ordinary failure, and preferred a crime to a misdemeanor. He determined, after the fashion of the celebrated cashier of the Royal Treasury, to abuse the trust deservedly won, and to increase the number of his creditors by making a final loan of the sum sufficient to keep him in comfort in a foreign country for the rest of his days. All this, as has been seen, he had prepared to do.

Aquilina knew nothing of the irksome cares of this life; she enjoyed her existence, as many a woman does, making no inquiry as to where the money came from, even as sundry other folk will eat their buttered rolls untroubled by any restless spirit of curiosity as to the culture and growth of wheat; but as the labor and miscalculations of agriculture lie on the other side of the baker's oven, so, beneath the unappreciated luxury of many a Parisian household, lie intolerable anxieties and exorbitant toil.

While Castanier was enduring the torture of the strain, and his thoughts were full of the deed that should change his whole life, Aquilina was lying luxuriously back in a great armchair by the fireside, beguiling the time by chatting with her waiting-maid. As frequently happens in such cases, the maid had become the mistress' confidante, Jenny having first assured herself that her mistress' ascendancy over Castanier was complete.

"What are we to do this evening? Léon seems determined to come," Mme. de la Garde was saying, as she read a passionate epistle indited upon a faint gray note-paper.

"Here is the master!" said Jenny.

Castanier came in. Aquilina, nowise disconcerted, crumpled up the letter, took it with the tongs, and held it in the flames.

"So that is what you do with your love-letters, is it?" asked Castanier.

"Oh, goodness, yes," said Aquilina; "is it not the best way of keeping them safe? Besides, fire should go to the fire, as water makes for the river."

"You are talking as if it were a real love-letter, Naqui——"

"Well, am I not handsome enough to receive them?" she said, holding up her forehead for a kiss. There was a carelessness in her manner that would have told any man less blind than Castanier that it was only a piece of conjugal duty, as it were, to give this joy to the cashier; but use and wont had brought Castanier to the point where clear-sightedness is no longer possible for love.

"I have taken a box at the Gymnase this evening," he said; "let us have dinner early, and then we need not dine in a hurry."

"Go and take Jenny. I am tired of plays. I do not know what is the matter with me this evening; I would rather stay here by the fire."

"Come, all the same though, Naqui; I shall not be here to bore you much longer. Yes, Naqui, I am going to start to-night, and it will be some time before I come back again. I am leaving everything in your charge. Will you keep your heart for me too?"

"Neither my heart nor anything else," she said; "but when you come back again, Naqui will still be Naqui for you."

"Well, this is frankness. So you would not follow me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Eh! why, how can I leave the lover who writes me such sweet little notes?" she asked, pointing to the blackened scrap of paper with a mocking smile.

"Is there any truth in it?" asked Castanier. "Have you really a lover?"

"Really!" cried Aquilina; "and have you never given it a serious thought, dear? To begin with, you are fifty years old. Then you have just the sort of face to put on a fruit stall; if the woman tried to sell you for a pumpkin, no one would contradict her. You puff and blow like a seal when you come upstairs; your paunch rises and falls like the diamond on a woman's forehead! It is pretty plain that you served in the dragoons! you are a very ugly-looking old man. Fiddle-de-dee. If you have any mind to keep my respect, I recommend you not to add imbecility to these qualities by imagining that such a girl as I am will be content with your asthmatic love, and not look for youth and good looks and pleasure by way of a variety——"

"Aquilina! you are laughing, of course?"

"Oh, very well; and are you not laughing too? Do you take me for a fool, telling me that you are going away? 'I am going to start to-night!'" she said, mimicking his tones. "Stuff and nonsense! Would you talk like that if you were really going away from your Naqui? You would cry, like the booby that you are!"

"After all, if I go, will you follow?" he asked.

"Tell me first whether this journey of yours is a bad joke or not."

"Yes, seriously, I am going."

"Well, then, seriously, I shall stay. A pleasant journey to you, my boy! I will wait till you come back. I would sooner take leave of life than take leave of my dear, cozy Paris——"

"Will you not come to Italy, to Naples, and lead a pleasant

life there—a delicious, luxurious life, with this stout old foggy of yours, who puffs and blows like a seal?”

“No.”

“Ungrateful girl!”

“Ungrateful?” she cried, rising to her feet. “I might leave this house this moment and take nothing out of it but myself. I shall have given you all the treasures a young girl can give, and something that not every drop in your veins and mine can ever give me back. If, by any means whatever, by selling my hopes of eternity, for instance, I could recover my past self, body and soul (for I have, perhaps, redeemed my soul), and be pure as a lily for my lover, I would not hesitate a moment! What sort of devotion has rewarded mine? You have housed and fed me, just as you give a dog food and a kennel because he is a protection to the house, and he may take kicks when we are out of humor, and lick our hands as soon as we are pleased to call to him. And which of us two will have been the more generous?” she curtly asked Castanier in conclusion.

“Oh! dear child, do you not see that I am joking?” returned Castanier. “I am going on a short journey; I shall not be away for very long. But come with me to the Gymnase; I shall start just before midnight, after I have had time to say good-bye to you.”

“Poor pet! so you are really going, are you?” she said. She put her arms round his neck, and drew down his head against her bodice.

“You are smothering me!” cried Castanier, with his face buried in Aquilina’s breast. That damsel turned to say in Jenny’s ear, “Go to Léon, and tell him not to come till one o’clock. If you do not find him, and he comes here during the leave-taking, keep him in your room. Well,” she went on, setting free Castanier, and giving a tweak to the tip of his nose, “never mind, handsomest of seals that you are. I will go to the theatre with you this evening. But all in good



time; let us have dinner! There is a nice little dinner for you—just what you like.”

“It is very hard to part from such a woman as you!” exclaimed Castanier.

“Very well then, why do you go?” asked she.

“Ah! why? why? If I were to begin to explain the reasons why, I must tell you things that would prove to you that I love you almost to madness. Ah! if you have sacrificed your honor for me, I have sold mine for you; we are quits. Is that love?”

“What is all this about?” said she. “Come, now, promise me that if I had a lover you would still love me as a father; that would be love! Come, now, promise it at once, and give us your fist upon it.”

“I should kill you,” and Castanier smiled as he spoke.

They sat down to the dinner table, and went thence to the Gymnase. When the first part of the performance was over, it occurred to Castanier to show himself to some of his acquaintances in the house, so as to turn away any suspicion of his departure. He left Mme. de la Garde in the corner box where she was seated, according to her modest wont, and went to walk up and down in the lobby. He had not gone many paces before he saw the Englishman, and with a sudden return of the sickening sensation of heat that once before had vibrated through him, and of the terror that he had felt already, he stood face to face with Melmoth.

“Forger!”

At the word, Castanier glanced round at the people who were moving about them. He fancied that he could see astonishment and curiosity in their eyes, and wishing to be rid of this Englishman at once, he raised his hand to strike him—and felt his arm paralyzed by some invisible power that sapped his strength and nailed him to the spot. He allowed the stranger to take him by the arm, and they walked together to the green-room like two friends.

“Who is strong enough to resist me?” said the Englishman, addressing him. “Do you not know that everything here on earth must obey me, that it is in my power to do everything? I read men’s thoughts, I see the future, and I know the past. I am here, and I can be elsewhere also. Time and space and distance are nothing to me. The whole world is at my beck and call. I have the power of continual enjoyment and of giving joy. I can see through walls, discover hidden treasures, and fill my hands with them. Palaces arise at my nod, and my architect makes no mistakes. I can make all lands break forth into blossom, heap up their gold and precious stones, and surround myself with fair women and ever-new faces; everything is yielded up to my will. I could gamble on the Stock Exchange, and my speculations would be infallible; but a man who can find the hoards that misers have hidden in the earth need not trouble himself about stocks. Feel the strength of the hand that grasps you; poor wretch, doomed to shame! Try to bend the arm of iron! try to soften the adamant heart! Fly from me if you dare! You would hear my voice in the depths of the caves that lie under the Seine; you might hide in the Catacombs, but would you not see me there? My voice could be heard through the sound of the thunder, my eyes shine as brightly as the sun, for I am the peer of Lucifer!”

Castanier heard the terrible words, and felt no protest nor contradiction within himself. He walked side by side with the Englishman, and had no power to leave him.

“You are mine; you have just committed a crime. I have found at last the mate whom I have sought. Have you a mind to learn your destiny? Aha! you came here to see a play, and you shall see a play—nay, two. Come. Present me to Mme. de la Garde as one of your best friends. Am I not your last hope of escape?”

Castanier, followed by the stranger, returned to his box, and, in accordance with the order he had just received, he

hastened to introduce Melmoth to Mme. de la Garde. Aquilina seemed to be not in the least surprised. The Englishman declined to take a seat in front, and Castanier was once more beside his mistress; the man's slightest wish must be obeyed. The last piece was about to begin, for, at that time, small theatres only gave three pieces. One of the actors had made the Gymnase the fashion, and that evening Perlet (the actor in question) was to play in a vaudeville called the *Le Comédien d'Etampes*, in which he filled four different parts.

When the curtain rose, the stranger stretched out his hand over the crowded house. Castanier's cry of terror died away, for the walls of his throat seemed glued together as Melmoth pointed to the stage, and the cashier knew that the play had been changed at the Englishman's desire.

He saw the strong-room at the bank; he saw the Baron de Nucingen in conference with a police-officer from the Prefecture, who was informing him of Castanier's conduct, explaining that the cashier had absconded with money taken from the safe, giving the history of the forged signature. The information was put in writing; the document signed and duly despatched to the Public Prosecutor.

"Are we in time, do you think?" asked Nucingen.

"Yes," said the agent of police; "he is at the Gymnase, and has no suspicion of anything."

Castanier fidgeted on his chair, and made as if he would leave the theatre, but Melmoth's hand lay on his shoulder, and he was obliged to sit and watch; the hideous power of the man produced an effect like that of nightmare, and he could not move a limb. Nay, the man himself was the nightmare; his presence weighed heavily on his victim like a poisoned atmosphere. When the wretched cashier turned to implore the Englishman's mercy, he met those blazing eyes that discharged electric currents, which pierced through him and transfixed him like darts of steel.

"What have I done to you?" he said, in his prostrate

helplessness, and he breathed hard like a stag at the water's edge. "What do you want of me?"

"Look!" cried Melmoth.

Castanier looked at the stage. The scene had been changed. The play seemed to be over, and Castanier beheld himself stepping from the carriage with Aquilina; but as he entered the courtyard of the house in the Rue Richer, the scene again was suddenly changed, and he saw his own house. Jenny was chatting by the fire in her mistress' room with a subaltern officer of a line regiment then stationed at Paris.

"He is going, is he?" said the sergeant, who seemed to belong to a family in easy circumstances; "I can be happy at my ease! I love Aquilina too well to allow her to belong to that old toad! I, myself, am going to marry Mme. de la Garde!" cried the sergeant.

"Old toad!" Castanier murmured piteously.

"Here come the master and mistress; hide yourself! Stay, get in here, Monsieur Léon," said Jenny. "The master won't stay here for very long."

Castanier watched the sergeant hide himself among Aquilina's gowns in her dressing-room. Almost immediately he himself appeared upon the scene, and took leave of his mistress, who made fun of him in "asides" to Jenny, while she uttered the sweetest and tenderest words in his ears. She wept with one side of her face, and laughed with the other. The audience called for an encore.

"Accursed creature!" cried Castanier from his box.

Aquilina was laughing till the tears came into her eyes.

"Goodness!" she cried, "how funny Perlet is as the Englishwoman! Why don't you laugh? Every one else in the house is laughing. Laugh, dear!" she said to Castanier.

Melmoth burst out laughing, and the unhappy cashier shuddered. The Englishman's laughter wrung his heart and tortured his brain; it was as if a surgeon had bored his skull with a red-hot iron.

"Laughing! are they laughing?" stammered Castanier.

He did not see the prim English lady whom Perlet was acting with such ludicrous effect, nor hear the English French that had filled the house with roars of laughter; instead of all this, he beheld himself hurrying from the Rue Richer, hailing a cab on the Boulevard, bargaining with the man to take him to Versailles. Then once more the scene changed. He recognized the sorry inn at the corner of the Rue de l'Orangerie and the Rue des Récollets, which was kept by his old quartermaster. It was two o'clock in the morning, the most perfect stillness prevailed, no one was there to watch his movements. The post-horses were put into the carriage (it came from a house in the Avenue de Paris in which an Englishman lived, and had been ordered in the foreigner's name to avoid raising suspicion). Castanier saw that he had his bills and his passports, stepped into the carriage, and set out. But at the barrier he saw two gendarmes lying in wait for the carriage. A cry of horror burst from him, but Melmoth gave him a glance, and again the sound died in his throat.

"Keep your eyes on the stage, and be quiet!" said the Englishman.

In another moment Castanier saw himself flung into prison at the Conciergerie; and in the fifth act of the drama, entitled "The Cashier," he saw himself, in three months' time, condemned to twenty years of penal servitude. Again a cry broke from him. He was exposed upon the Place du Palais-de-Justice, and the executioner branded him with a red-hot iron. Then came the last scene of all; among some sixty convicts in the prison yard of the Bicêtre, he was awaiting his turn to have the irons riveted on his limbs.

"Dear me! I cannot laugh any more?" said Aquilina. "You are very solemn, dear boy; what can be the matter? The gentleman has gone."

"A word with you, Castanier," said Melmoth when the

piece was at an end, and the attendant was fastening Mme. de la Garde's cloak.

The corridor was crowded, and escape impossible.

"Very well, what is it?"

"No human power can hinder you from taking Aquilina home, and going next to Versailles, there to be arrested."

"How so?"

"Because you are in a hand that will never relax its grasp," returned the Englishman.

Castanier longed for the power to utter some word that should blot him out from among living men and hide him in the lowest depths of hell.

"Suppose that the devil were to make a bid for your soul, would you not give it to him now in exchange for the power of God? One single word, and those five hundred thousand francs shall be back in the Baron de Nucingen's safe; then you can tear up your letter of credit, and all traces of your crime will be obliterated. Moreover, you would have gold in torrents. You hardly believe in anything perhaps? Well, if all this comes to pass, you will believe at least in the devil."

"If it were only possible!" said Castanier joyfully.

"The man who can do it all gives you his word that it is possible," answered the Englishman.

Melmoth, Castanier, and Mme. de la Garde were standing out in the Boulevard when Melmoth raised his arm. A drizzling rain was falling, the streets were muddy, the air was close, there was thick darkness overhead; but in a moment, as the arm was outstretched, Paris was filled with sunlight; it was high noon on a bright July day. The trees were covered with leaves; a double stream of joyous holiday makers strolled beneath them. Sellers of licorice water shouted their cool drinks. Splendid carriages rolled past along the streets. A cry of terror broke from the cashier, and at that cry rain and darkness once more settled down upon the Boulevard.

Mme. de la Garde had stepped into the carriage. "Do be quick, dear!" she cried, "either come in or stay out. Really you are as dull as ditch water this evening——"

"What must I do?" Castanier asked of Melmoth.

"Would you like to take my place?" inquired the Englishman.

"Yes."

"Very well, then; I will be at your house in a few moments."

"By the by, Castanier, you are rather off your balance?" Aquilina remarked. "There is some mischief brewing; you were quite melancholy and thoughtful all through the play. Do you want anything that I can give you, dear? Tell me?"

"I am waiting till we are at home to know whether you love me."

"You need not wait till then," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "There!" she said, as she embraced him, passionately to all appearance, and plied him with the coaxing caresses that are part of the business of such a life as hers, like stage action for an actress.

"Where is the music?" asked Castanier.

"What next? Only think of your hearing music now!"

"Heavenly music!" he went on. "The sounds seem to come from above."

"What? You have always refused to give me a box at the Italiens because you could not abide music, and are you turning music-mad at this time of day? Mad—that you are! The music is inside your own noddle, old addle-pate!" she went on, as she took his head in her hands and rocked it to and fro on her shoulder. "Tell me now, old man; isn't it the creaking of the wheels that sings in your ears?"

"Just listen, Naqui! If the angels make music for God Almighty, it must be such music as this that I am drinking in at every pore, rather than hearing. I do not know how to tell you about it; it is as sweet as honey-water!"

"Why, of course, they have music in heaven, for the angels in all the pictures have harps in their hands. He is mad, upon my word!" she said to herself, as she saw Castanier's attitude; he looked like an opium-eater in a blissful trance.

They reached the house. Castanier, absorbed by the thought of all that he had just heard and seen, knew not whether to believe it or no; he was like a drunken man, and utterly unable to think connectedly. He came to himself in Aquilina's room, whither he had been supported by the united efforts of his mistress, the porter, and Jenny; for he had fainted as he stepped from the carriage.

"*He* will be here directly! Oh, my friends, my friends!" he cried, and he flung himself despairingly into the depths of a low chair beside the fire.

Jenny heard the bell as he spoke, and admitted the Englishman. She announced that "a gentleman had come who had made an appointment with the master," when Melmoth suddenly appeared, and deep silence followed. He looked at the porter—the porter went; he looked at Jenny—and Jenny went likewise.

"Madame," said Melmoth, turning to Aquilina, "with your permission, we will conclude a piece of urgent business."

He took Castanier's hand, and Castanier rose, and the two men went into the drawing-room. There was no light in the room, but Melmoth's eyes lit up the thickest darkness. The gaze of those strange eyes had left Aquilina like one spell-bound; she was helpless, unable to take any thought for her lover; moreover, she believed him to be safe in Jenny's room, whereas their early return had taken the waiting-woman by surprise, and she had hidden the officer in the dressing-room. It had all happened exactly as in the drama that Melmoth had displayed for his victim. Presently the house-door was slammed violently, and Castanier reappeared.

"What ails you?" cried the horror-struck Aquilina.

There was a change in the cashier's appearance. A strange



pallor overspread his once rubicund countenance ; it wore the peculiarly sinister and stony look of the mysterious visitor. The sullen glare of his eyes was intolerable, the fierce light in them seemed to scorch. The man who had looked so good-humored and good-natured had suddenly grown tyrannical and proud. The courtesan thought that Castanier had grown thinner ; there was a terrible majesty in his brow ; it was as if a dragon breathed forth a malignant influence that weighed upon the others like a close, heavy atmosphere. For a moment Aquilina knew not what to do.

"What passed between you and that diabolical-looking man in those few minutes ?" she asked at length.

"I have sold my soul to him. I feel it ; I am no longer the same. He has taken my *self*, and given me his soul in exchange."

"What ?"

"You would not understand it at all—Ah ! he was right," Castanier went on, "the fiend was right ! I see everything and know all things. You have been deceiving me !"

Aquilina turned cold with terror. Castanier lighted a candle and went into the dressing-room. The unhappy girl followed him in dazed bewilderment, and great was her astonishment when Castanier drew the dresses that hung there aside and disclosed the sergeant.

"Come out, my boy," said the cashier ; and, taking Léon by a button of his overcoat, he drew the officer into his room.

The Piedmontese, haggard and desperate, had flung herself into her easy-chair. Castanier seated himself on a sofa by the fire, and left Aquilina's lover in a standing position.

"You have been in the army," said Léon ; "I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"You are a fool," said Castanier drily. "I have no occasion to fight. I could kill you by a look if I had any mind to do it. I will tell you what it is, youngster ; why should I kill you ? I can see a red line round your neck—the guillo-

tine is waiting for you. Yes, you will end in the Place de Grève. You are the headsman's property ! there is no escape for you. You belong to a *vendita* of the Carbonari. You are plotting against the government."

"You did not tell me that," cried the Piedmontese, turning to Léon.

"So you do not know that the Minister decided this morning to put down your society?" the cashier continued. "The Procureur-Général has a list of your names. You have been betrayed. They are busy drawing up the indictment at this moment."

"Then was it you who betrayed him?" cried Aquilina, and with a hoarse sound in her throat like the growl of a tigress she rose to her feet ; she seemed as if she would tear Castanier in pieces.

"You know me too well to believe it," Castanier retorted. Aquilina was benumbed by his coolness.

"Then how did you know it?" she murmured.

"I did not know it until I went into the drawing-room ; now I know it—now I see and know all things, and can do all things."

The sergeant was overcome with amazement.

"Very well then, save him, save him, dear!" cried the girl, flinging herself at Castanier's feet. "If nothing is impossible to you, save him ! I will love you, I will adore you, I will be your slave and not your mistress. I will obey your wildest whims ; you shall do as you will with me. Yes, yes, I will give you more than love ; you shall have a daughter's devotion as well as—Rodolphe ! why will you not understand ! After all, however violent my passions may be, I shall be yours for ever ! What should I say to persuade you ? I will invent pleasures—I—Great heavens ! one moment ! whatever you shall ask of me—to fling myself from the window, for instance—you will need to say but one word, 'Léon !' and I will plunge down into hell. I would bear

any torture, any pain of body or soul, anything you might inflict upon me ! ”

Castanier heard her with indifference. For all answer, he indicated Léon to her with a fiendish laugh.

“ The guillotine is waiting for him,” he repeated.

“ No, no, no ! He shall not leave this house. I will save him ! ” she cried. “ Yes ; I will kill any one who lays a finger upon him ! Why will you not save him ? ” she shrieked aloud ; her eyes were blazing, her hair unbound. “ Can you save him ? ”

“ I can do everything.”

“ Why do you not save him ? ”

“ Why ? ” shouted Castanier, and his voice made the ceiling ring. “ Eh ! it is my revenge ! Doing evil is my trade ! ”

“ Die ? ” said Aquilina ; “ must he die, my lover. Is it possible ? ”

She sprang up and snatched a stiletto from a basket that stood on the chest of drawers and went to Castanier, who began to laugh.

“ You know very well that steel cannot hurt me now——”

Aquilina’s arm suddenly dropped like a snapped harp string.

“ Out with you, my good friend,” said the cashier, turning to the sergeant, “ and go about your business.”

He held out his hand ; the other felt Castanier’s superior power, and could not choose but obey.

“ This house is mine. I could send for the commissary of police if I chose, and give you up as a man who has hidden himself on my premises, but I would rather let you go ; I am a fiend, I am not a spy.”

“ I shall follow him ! ” said Aquilina.

“ Then follow him,” returned Castanier. “ Here, Jenny, Jenny——”

Jenny appeared.

“ Tell the porter to hail a cab for them. Here, Naqui,” said Castanier, drawing a bundle of bank-notes from his

pocket ; "you shall not go away like a pauper from a man who loves you still."

He held out three hundred thousand francs. Aquilina took the notes, flung them on the floor, spat on them, and trampled upon them in a frenzy of despair.

"We will leave this house on foot," she cried, "without a farthing of your money. Jenny, stay where you are."

"Good-evening!" answered the cashier, as he gathered up the notes again. "I have come back from my journey. Jenny," he added, looking at the bewildered waiting-maid, "you seem to me to be a good sort of girl. You have no mistress now. Come here. This evening you shall have a master."

Aquilina, who felt safe nowhere, went at once with the sergeant to the house of one of her friends. But all Léon's movements were suspiciously watched by the police, and after a time he and three of his friends were arrested. The whole story may be found in the newspapers of that day.

Castanier felt that he had undergone a mental as well as a physical transformation. The Castanier of old no longer existed—the boy, the young Lothario, the soldier who had proved his courage, who had been tricked into a marriage and disillusioned, the cashier, the passionate lover who had committed a crime for Aquilina's sake. His inmost nature had suddenly asserted itself. His brain had expanded, his senses had developed. His thoughts comprehended the whole world ; he saw all the things of earth as if he had been raised to some high pinnacle above the world.

Until that evening at the play he had loved Aquilina to distraction. Rather than give her up he would have shut his eyes to her infidelities ; and now all that blind passion had passed away as a cloud vanishes in the sunlight.

Jenny was delighted to succeed to her mistress' position and fortune, and did the cashier's will in all things ; but

Castanier, who could read the inmost thoughts of the soul, discovered the real motive underlying this purely physical devotion. He amused himself with her, however, like a mischievous child who greedily sucks the juice of the cherry and flings away the stone. The next morning at breakfast-time, when she was fully convinced that she was a lady and the mistress of the house, Castanier uttered one by one the thoughts that filled her mind as she drank her coffee.

"Do you know what you are thinking, child?" he said, smiling, "I will tell you: 'So all that lovely rosewood furniture that I coveted so much, and the pretty dresses that I used to try on, are mine now! All on easy terms that madame refused, I do not know why. My word! if I might drive about in a carriage, have jewels and pretty things, a box at the theatre, and put something by! with me he should lead a life of pleasure fit to kill him if he were not as strong as a Turk! I never saw such a man!' Was not that just what you were thinking," he went on, and something in his voice made Jenny turn pale. "Well, yes, child; you could not stand it, and I am sending you away for your own good; you would perish in the attempt. Come, let us part good friends," and he coolly dismissed her with a very small sum of money.

The first use that Castanier had promised himself that he would make of the terrible power bought at the price of his eternal happiness was the full and complete indulgence of all his tastes.

He first put his affairs in order, readily settled his account with M. de Nucingen, who found a worthy German to succeed him, and then determined on a carouse worthy of the palmiest days of the Roman Empire. He plunged into dissipation as recklessly as Belshazzar of old went to that last feast in Babylon. Like Belshazzar, he saw clearly through his revels a gleaming hand that traced his doom in letters of flame, not on the narrow walls of the banqueting-chamber, but over the vast spaces of heaven that the rainbow spans. His feast was

not, indeed, an orgy confined within the limits of a banquet, for he squandered all the powers of soul and body in exhausting all the pleasures of earth. The table was in some sort earth itself, the earth that trembled beneath his feet. His was the last festival of the reckless spendthrift who has thrown all prudence to the winds. The devil had given him the key of the storehouse of human pleasures; he had filled and refilled his hands, and he was fast nearing the bottom. In a moment he had felt all that that enormous power could accomplish; in a moment he had exercised it, proved it, wearied of it. What had hitherto been the sum of human desires became as nothing. So often it happens that with possession the vast poetry of desire must end, and the thing possessed is seldom the thing that we dreamed of.

Beneath Melmoth's omnipotence lurked this tragical anticlimax of so many a passion, and now the inanity of human nature was revealed to his successor, to whom infinite power brought nothingness as a dowry.

To come to a clear understanding of Castanier's strange position, it must be borne in mind how suddenly these revolutions of thought and feeling had been wrought; how quickly they had succeeded each other; and of these things it is hard to give any idea to those who have never broken the prison bonds of time, and space, and distance. His relation to the world without had been entirely changed with the expansion of his faculties.

Like Melmoth himself, Castanier could travel in a few moments over the fertile plains of India, could soar on the wings of demons above African desert spaces, or skim the surface of the seas. The same insight that could read the inmost thoughts of others could apprehend at a glance the nature of any material object, just as he caught as it were all flavors at once upon his tongue. He took his pleasure like a despot; a blow of the axe felled the tree that he might eat its fruits. The transitions, the alternations that measure joy and pain, and

diversify human happiness, no longer existed for him. He had so completely glutted his appetites that pleasure must overpass the limits of pleasure to tickle a palate cloyed with satiety, and suddenly grown fastidious beyond all measure, so that ordinary pleasures became distasteful. Conscious that at will he was the master of all the women that he could desire, knowing that his power was irresistible, he did not care to exercise it ; they were pliant to his unexpressed wishes, to his most extravagant caprices, until he felt a horrible thirst for love, and would have love beyond their power to give.

The world refused him nothing save faith and prayer, the soothing and consoling love that is not of this world. He was obeyed—it was a horrible position.

The torrents of pain, and pleasure, and thought that shook his soul and his bodily frame would have overwhelmed the strongest human being ; but in him there was a power of vitality proportioned to the power of the sensations that assailed him. He felt within him a vague immensity of longing that earth could not satisfy. He spent his days on outspread wings, longing to traverse the luminous fields of space to other spheres that he knew afar by intuitive perception, a clear and hopeless knowledge. His soul dried up within him, for he hungered and thirsted after things that can neither be drunk nor eaten, but for which he could not choose but crave. His lips, like Melmoth's, burned with desire ; he panted for the unknown, for he knew all things.

The mechanism and the scheme of the world was apparent to him, and its working interested him no longer ; he did not long disguise the profound scorn that makes of a man of extraordinary powers a sphinx who knows everything and says nothing, and sees all things with an unmoved countenance. He felt not the slightest wish to communicate his knowledge to other men. He was rich with all the wealth of the world, with one effort he could make the circle of the globe, and riches and power were meaningless for him. He felt the

awful melancholy of omnipotence, a melancholy which Satan and God relieve by the exercise of infinite power in mysterious ways known to them alone. Castanier had not, like his master, the inextinguishable energy of hate and malice; he felt that he was a devil, but a devil whose time was not yet come, while Satan is a devil through all eternity, and being damned beyond redemption delights to stir up the world, like a dung-heap, with his triple fork and to thwart therein the designs of God. But Castanier, for his misfortune, had one hope left.

If in a moment he could move from one pole to the other as a bird springs restlessly from side to side in its cage, when, like the bird, he had crossed his prison, he saw the vast immensity of space beyond it. That vision of the Infinite left him for ever unable to see humanity and its affairs as other men saw them. The insensate fools who long for the power of the devil gauge its desirability from a human standpoint; they do not see that with the devil's power they will likewise assume his thoughts, and that they will be doomed to remain as men among creatures who will no longer understand them. The Nero unknown to history who dreams of setting Paris on fire for his private entertainment, like an exhibition of a burning house on the boards of a theatre, does not suspect that, if he had that power, Paris would become for him as little interesting as an ant-heap by the roadside to a hurrying passer-by. The circle of the sciences was for Castanier something like a logogriph for a man who does not know the key to it. Kings and governments were despicable in his eyes. His great debauch had been in some sort a deplorable farewell to his life as a man. The earth had grown too narrow for him, for the infernal gifts laid bare for him the secrets of creation—he saw the cause and foresaw its end. He was shut out from all that men call “heaven” in all languages under the sun; he could no longer think of heaven.

Then he came to understand the look on his predecessor's



face and the drying up of the life within ; then he knew all that was meant by the baffled hope that gleamed in Melmoth's eyes ; he, too, knew the thirst that burned those red lips, and the agony of a continual struggle between two natures grown to giant size. Even yet he might be an angel, and he knew himself to be a fiend. His was the fate of a sweet and gentle creature that a wizard's malice has imprisoned in a misshapen form, entrapping it by a pact, so that another's will must set it free from its detested envelope.

As a deception only increases the ardor with which a man of really great nature explores the infinite of sentiment in a woman's heart, so Castanier awoke to find that one idea lay like a weight upon his soul, an idea which was perhaps the key to loftier spheres. The very fact that he had bartered away his eternal happiness led him to dwell in thought upon the future of those who pray and believe. On the morrow of his debauch, when he entered into the sober possession of his power, this idea made him feel himself a prisoner ; he knew the burden of the woe that poets, and prophets, and great oracles of faith have set forth for us in such mighty words ; he felt the point of the flaming sword plunged into his side, and hurried in search of Melmoth. What had become of his predecessor ?

The Englishman was living in a mansion in the Rue Férou, near Saint-Sulpice—a gloomy, dark, damp, and cold abode. The Rue Férou itself is one of the most dismal streets in Paris ; it has a north aspect like all the streets that lie at right angles to the left bank of the Seine, and the houses are in keeping with the site. As Castanier stood on the threshold he found that the door itself, like the vaulted roof, was hung with black ; rows of lighted tapers shone brilliantly as though some king were lying in state ; and a priest stood on either side of a catafalque that had been raised there.

"There is no need to ask why you have come, sir," the old hall porter said to Castanier ; "you are so like our poor

dear master that is gone. But if you are his brother, you have come too late to bid him good-bye. The good gentleman died the night before last."

"How did he die?" Castanier asked of one of the priests.

"Set your mind at rest," said an old priest; he partly raised as he spoke the black pall that covered the catafalque.

Castanier, looking at him, saw one of those faces that faith has made sublime; the soul seemed to shine forth from every line of it, bringing light and warmth for other men, kindled by the unfailing charity within. This was Sir John Melmoth's confessor.

"Your brother made an end that men may envy, and that must rejoice the angels. Do you know what joy there is in heaven over a sinner that repents? His tears of penitence, excited by grace, flowed without ceasing; death alone checked them. The Holy Spirit dwelt in him. His burning words, full of lively faith, were worthy of the Prophet-King. If, in the course of my life, I have never heard a more dreadful confession than from the lips of this English gentleman, I have likewise never heard such fervent and passionate prayers. However great the measures of his sins may have been, his repentance has filled the abyss to overflowing. The hand of God was visibly stretched out above him, for he was completely changed, there was such heavenly beauty in his face. The hard eyes were softened by tears; the resonant voice that struck terror into those who heard it took the tender and compassionate tones of those who themselves have passed through deep humiliation. He so edified those who heard his words that some who had felt drawn to see the spectacle of a Christian's death fell on their knees as he spoke of heavenly things, and of the infinite glory of God, and gave thanks and praise to Him. If he is leaving no worldly wealth to his family, no family can possess a greater blessing than this that he surely gained for them, a soul among the blessed, who will watch over you all and direct you in the path to heaven."

These words made such a vivid impression upon Castanier that he instantly hurried from the house to the Church of Saint-Sulpice, obeying what might be called a decree of fate. Melmoth's repentance had stupefied him.

At that time, on certain mornings in the week, a preacher, famed for his eloquence, was wont to hold conferences, in the course of which he demonstrated the truths of the Catholic faith for the youth of a generation proclaimed to be indifferent in matters of belief by another voice no less eloquent than his own. The conference had been put off to a later hour on account of Melmoth's funeral, so Castanier arrived just as the great preacher was epitomizing the proofs of a future existence of happiness with all the charm of eloquence and force of expression which have made him famous. The seeds of divine doctrine fell into a soil prepared for them in the old dragoon, into whom the devil had glided. Indeed, if there is a phenomenon well attested by experience, is it not the spiritual phenomenon commonly called the "faith of the peasant?" The strength of belief varies inversely with the amount of use that a man has made of his reasoning faculties. Simple people and soldiers belong to the unreasoning class. Those who have marched through life beneath the banner of instinct are far more ready to receive the light than minds and hearts overwearied with the world's sophistries.

Castanier had a southern temperament; he had joined the army as a lad of sixteen, and had followed the French flag till he was nearly forty years old. As a common trooper, he had fought day and night, and day after day, and, as in duty bound, had thought of his horse first, and of himself afterwards. While he served his military apprenticeship, therefore, he had but little leisure in which to reflect on the destiny of man, and when he became an officer he had his men to think of. He had been swept from battlefield to battlefield, but he had never thought of what comes after death. A soldier's life does not demand much thinking. Those who

cannot understand the lofty political ends involved and the interests of nation and nation; who cannot grasp political schemes as well as plans of campaign, and combine the science of the tactician with that of the administrator, are bound to live in a state of ignorance; the most boorish peasant in the most backward district in France is scarcely in a worse case. Such men as these bear the brunt of war, yield passive obedience to the brain that directs them, and strike down the men opposed to them as the woodcutter fells timber in the forest. Violent physical exertion is succeeded by times of inertia, when they repair the waste. They fight and drink, fight and eat, fight and sleep, that they may the better deal hard blows; the powers of the mind are not greatly exercised in this turbulent round of existence, and the character is as simple as heretofore.

When the men who have shown such energy on the battlefield return to ordinary civilization, most of those who have not risen to high rank seem to have acquired no ideas, and to have no aptitude, no capacity, for grasping new ideas. To the utter amazement of a younger generation, those who made our armies so glorious and so terrible are as simple as children, and as slow-witted as a clerk at his worst, and the captain of a thundering squadron is scarcely fit to keep a merchant's day-book. Old soldiers of this stamp, therefore, being innocent of any attempt to use their reasoning faculties, act upon their strongest impulses. Castanier's crime was one of those matters that raise so many questions, that, in order to debate about it, a moralist might call for its "discussion by clauses," to make use of a parliamentary expression.

Passion had counseled the crime; the cruelly irresistible power of feminine witchery had driven him to commit it; no man can say of himself, "I will never do that," when a siren joins in the combat and throws her spells over him.

So the word of life fell upon a conscience newly awakened to the truths of religion which the French Revolution and a

soldier's career had forced Castanier to neglect. The solemn words, "You will be happy or miserable for all eternity!" made but the more terrible impression upon him, because he had exhausted earth and shaken it like a barren tree; because his desires could effect all things, so that it was enough that any spot in earth or heaven should be forbidden him, and he forthwith thought of nothing else. If it were allowable to compare such great things with social follies, Castanier's position was not unlike that of a banker who, finding that his all-powerful millions cannot obtain for him an entrance into the society of the noblesse, must set his heart upon entering that circle, and all the social privileges that he has already acquired are as nothing in his eyes from the moment when he discovers that a single one is lacking.

Here was a man more powerful than all the kings on earth put together; a man who, like Satan, could wrestle with God Himself; leaning against one of the pillars in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, weighed down by the feelings and thoughts that oppressed him, and absorbed in the thought of a future, the same thought that had engulfed Melmoth.

"He was very happy, was Melmoth!" cried Castanier. "He died in the certain knowledge that he would go to heaven."

In a moment the greatest possible change had been wrought in the cashier's ideas. For several days he had been a devil, now he was nothing but a man; an image of the fallen Adam, of the sacred tradition embodied in all cosmogonies. But while he had thus shrunk to man's estate he retained a germ of greatness, he had been steeped in the Infinite. The power of hell had revealed the divine power. He thirsted for heaven as he had never thirsted after the pleasures of earth, that are so soon exhausted. The enjoyments which the fiend promises are but the enjoyments of earth on a larger scale, but to the joys of heaven there is no limit. He believed in God, and the spell that gave him the treasures of the world was as

nothing to him now ; the treasures themselves seemed to him as contemptible as pebbles to an admirer of diamonds ; they were but gewgaws compared with the eternal glories of the other life. A curse lay, he thought, on all things that came to him from this source. He sounded dark depths of painful thought as he listened to the service performed for Melmoth. The *Dies ira* filled him with awe ; he felt all the grandeur of that cry of a repentant soul trembling before the throne of God. The Holy Spirit, like a devouring flame, passed through him as fire consumes straw.

The tears were falling from his eyes when—"Are you a relation of the dead?" the beadle asked him.

"I am his heir," Castanier answered.

"Give something for the expenses of the services!" cried the man.

"No," said the cashier. (The devil's money should not go to the church.)

"For the poor!"

"No."

"For repairing the church!"

"No."

"The Lady Chapel!"

"No."

"For the schools!"

"No."

Castanier went, not caring to expose himself to the sour looks that the irritated functionaries gave him.

Outside, in the street, he looked up at the Church of Saint-Sulpice. "What made people build the giant cathedrals I have seen in every country?" he asked himself. "The feeling shared so widely throughout all time must surely be based upon something."

"Something! Do you call God *something*?" cried his conscience. "God! God! God!—"

The word was echoed and re-echoed by an inner voice, till

it overwhelmed him ; but his feeling of terror subsided as he heard sweet distant sounds of music that he had caught faintly before. They were singing in the church, he thought, and his eyes scanned the great doorway. But as he listened more closely, the sounds poured upon him from all sides ; he looked round the square, but there was no sign of any musicians. The melody brought visions of a distant heaven and far-off gleams of hope ; but it also quickened the remorse that had set the lost soul in a ferment. He went on his way through Paris, walking as men walk who are crushed beneath the burden of their sorrow, seeing everything with unseeing eyes, loitering like an idler, stopping without cause, muttering to himself, careless of the traffic, making no effort to avoid a blow from a plank of timber.

Imperceptibly repentance brought him under the influence of the divine grace that soothes while it bruises the heart so terribly. His face came to wear a look of Melmoth, something great, with a trace of madness in the greatness. A look of dull and hopeless distress, mingled with the excited eagerness of hope, and, beneath it all, a gnawing sense of loathing for all that the world can give. The humblest of prayers lurked in the eyes that saw with such dreadful clearness. His power was the measure of his anguish. His body was bowed down by the fearful storm that shook his soul, as the tall pines bend before the blast. Like his predecessor, he could not refuse to bear the burden of life ; he was afraid to die while he bore the yoke of hell. The torment grew intolerable.

At last, one morning, he bethought himself how that Melmoth (now among the blessed) had made the proposal of an exchange, and how that he had accepted it ; others, doubtless, would follow his example ; for in an age proclaimed, by the inheritors of the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church, to be fatally indifferent to religion, it should be easy to find a man who would accept the conditions of the contract in order to prove its advantages.

"There is one place where you can learn what kings will fetch in the market ; where nations are weighed in the balance and systems appraised ; where the value of a government is stated in terms of the five-franc piece ; where ideas and beliefs have their price, and everything is discounted ; where God Himself, in a manner, borrows on the security of His revenue of souls, for the Pope has a running account there. Is it not there that I should go to traffic in souls ?"

Castanier went quite joyously on 'Change, thinking that it would be as easy to buy a soul as to invest money in the "Funds." Any ordinary person would have feared ridicule, but Castanier knew by experience that a desperate man takes everything seriously. A prisoner lying under sentence of death would listen to the madman who should tell him that by pronouncing some gibberish he could escape through the keyhole ; for suffering is credulous, and clings to an idea until it fails, as the swimmer borne along by the current clings to the branch that snaps in his hand.

Towards four o'clock that afternoon Castanier appeared among the little knots of men who were transacting private business after 'Change. He was personally known to some of the brokers ; and while affecting to be in search of an acquaintance, he managed to pick up the current gossip and rumors of failure.

"Catch me negotiating bills for Claparon & Co., my boy. The bank collector went round to return their acceptances to them this morning," said a fat banker in his outspoken way. "If you have any of their paper, lookout !"

Claparon was in the building, in deep consultation with a man well known for the ruinous rate at which he loaned money. Castanier went forthwith in search of the said Claparon, a merchant who had a reputation for taking heavy risks that meant wealth or utter ruin. The money-lender walked away as Castanier came up. A gesture betrayed the speculator's despair.



"Well, Claparon, the bank wants a hundred thousand francs of you, and it is four o'clock; the thing is known, and it is too late to arrange your little failure comfortably," said Castanier.

"Sir!"

"Speak lower," the cashier went on. "How if I were to propose a piece of business that would bring you in as much money as you require?"

"It would not discharge my liabilities; every business that I ever heard of wants a little time to simmer in."

"I know of something that will set you straight in a moment," answered Castanier; "but first you would have to——"

"Do what?"

"Sell your share of paradise. It is a matter of business like anything else, isn't it? We all hold shares in the great speculation of eternity."

"I tell you this," said Claparon angrily, "that I am just the man to lend you a slap in the face. When a man is in trouble, it is no time to play silly jokes on him."

"I am talking seriously," said Castanier, and he drew a bundle of notes from his pocket.

"In the first place," said Claparon, "I am not going to sell my soul to the devil for a trifle. I want five hundred thousand francs before I strike——"

"Who talks of stinting you?" asked Castanier, cutting him short. "You should have more gold than you could stow in the cellars of the Bank of France."

He held out a handful of notes. That decided Claparon. "Done," he cried; "but how is the bargain to be made?"

"Let us go over yonder, no one is standing there," said Castanier, pointing to a corner of the court.

Claparon and his tempter exchanged a few words, with their faces turned to the wall. None of the onlookers guessed the nature of this by-play, though their curiosity was keenly excited by the strange gestures of the two contracting parties.

When Castanier returned, there was a sudden outburst of amazed exclamation. As in the assembly where the least event immediately attracts attention, all faces were turned to the two men who had caused the sensation, and a shiver passed through all beholders at the change that had taken place in them.

The men who form the moving crowd that fills the Stock Exchange are soon known to each other by sight. They watch each other like players round a card-table. Some shrewd observers can tell how a man will play and the condition of his exchequer from a survey of his face ; and the Stock Exchange is simply a vast card-table. Every one, therefore, had noticed Claparon and Castanier. The latter (like the Englishman before him) had been muscular and powerful, his eyes were full of light, his color high. The dignity and power in his face had struck awe into them all ; they wondered how old Castanier had come by it ; and now they beheld Castanier divested of his power, shrunken, wrinkled, aged, and feeble. He had drawn Claparon out of the crowd with the energy of a sick man in a fever fit ; he had looked like an opium-eater during the brief period of excitement that the drug can give ; now, on his return, he seemed to be in the condition of utter exhaustion in which the patient dies after the fever departs, or to be suffering from the horrible prostration that follows an excessive indulgence in the delights of narcotics. The infernal power that had upheld him through his debauches had left him, and the body was left unaided and alone to endure the agony of remorse and the heavy burden of sincere repentance. Claparon's troubles every one could guess ; but Claparon reappeared, on the other hand, with sparkling eyes, holding his head high with the pride of Lucifer. The crisis had passed from the one man to the other.

"Now you can drop off with an easy mind, old man," said Claparon to Castanier.

"For pity's sake, send for a cab and for a priest ; send for

the curate of Saint-Sulpice!" answered the old dragoon, sinking down upon the curbstone.

The words "a priest" reached the ears of several people, and produced uproarious jeering among the stockbrokers, for faith with these gentlemen means a belief that a scrap of paper called a mortgage represents an estate, and the list of fundholders is their Bible.

"Shall I have time to repent?" said Castanier to himself in a piteous voice, that impressed Claparon.

A cab carried away the dying man; the speculator went to the bank at once to meet his bills; and the momentary sensation produced upon the throng of business men by the sudden change on the two faces vanished like the furrow cut by a ship's keel in the sea. News of the greatest importance kept the attention of the world of commerce on the alert; and when commercial interests are at stake, Moses might appear with his two luminous horns, and his coming would scarcely receive the honors of a pun; the gentleman whose business it is to write the market reports would ignore his existence.

When Claparon had made his payments, fear seized upon him. There was no mistake about his power. He went on 'Change again, and offered his bargain to other men in embarrassed circumstances. The devil's bond, "together with the rights, easements, and privileges appertaining thereunto"—to use the expression of the notary who succeeded Claparon—changed hands for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs. The notary in his turn parted with the agreement with the devil for five hundred thousand francs to a building contractor in difficulties, who likewise got rid of it to an iron merchant in consideration of a hundred thousand crowns. In fact, by five o'clock people had ceased to believe in the strange contract, and purchasers were lacking for want of confidence.

At half-past five the holder of the bond was a house-painter, who was lounging by the door of the building in the Rue

Feydeau, where at that time stockbrokers temporarily congregated. The house-painter, simple fellow, could not think what was the matter with him. He "felt all anyhow," so he told his wife when he went home.

The Rue Feydeau, as idlers about town are aware, is a place of pilgrimage for youths who for lack of a mistress bestow their ardent affection upon the whole sex. On the first floor of the most rigidly respectable domicile therein dwelt one of those exquisite creatures whom it has pleased heaven to endow with the rarest and most surpassing beauty. As it is impossible that they should all be duchesses or queens (since there are many more pretty women in the world than titles and thrones for them to adorn), they are content to make a stockbroker or a banker happy at a fixed price. To this good-natured beauty, Euphrasia by name, an unbounded ambition had led a notary's clerk to aspire. In short, the second clerk in the office of Maitre Crottat, notary, had fallen in love with her, as youth at two-and-twenty can fall in love. The scrivener would have murdered the Pope and run amuck through the whole sacred college to procure the miserable sum of a hundred louis to pay for a shawl which had turned Euphrasia's head, at which price her waiting-woman had promised that Euphrasia should be his. The infatuated youth walked to and fro under Madame Euphrasia's windows, like the polar bears in their cage at the Jardin des Plantes, with his right hand thrust beneath his waistcoat in the region of the heart, which he was fit to tear from his bosom, but as yet he had only wrenched at the elastic of his braces.

"What can one do to raise ten thousand francs?" he asked himself. "Shall I make off with the money that I must pay on the registration of that conveyance? Good heavens! my loan would not ruin the purchaser, a man with seven millions! And then next day I would fling myself at his feet and say, 'I have taken ten thousand francs belonging to you, sir; I am twenty-two years of age, and I am in love with Euphrasia

—that is my story. My father is rich, he will pay you back ; do not ruin me ! Have you not yourself been twenty-two years old and madly in love ?' But these beggarly land-owners have no souls ! He would be quite likely to give me up to the public prosecutor, instead of taking pity upon me. Good God ! if it were only possible to sell your soul to the devil ! But there is neither a God nor a devil ; it is all nonsense out of nursery tales and old wives' talk. What shall I do ?"

"If you have a mind to sell your soul to the devil, sir," said the house-painter, who had overheard something that the clerk let fall, "you can have the ten thousand francs."

"And Euphrasia !" cried the clerk, as he struck a bargain with the devil that inhabited the house-painter.

The pact concluded, the frantic clerk went to find the shawl, and mounted Madame Euphrasia's staircase ; and as (literally) the devil was in him, he did not come down for twelve days, drowning the thought of hell and of his privileges in twelve days of love and riot and forgetfulness, for which he had bartered away all his hopes of a paradise to come.

And in this way the secret of the vast power discovered and acquired by the Englishman, the offspring of Mathurin's brain, was lost to mankind ; and the various Orientalists, mystics, and archæologists who take an interest in these matters were unable to hand down to posterity the proper method of invoking the devil, for the following sufficient reasons :

On the thirteenth day after these frenzied nuptials the wretched clerk lay on a pallet bed in a garret in his master's house in the Rue Saint-Honoré. Shame, the stupid goddess who dares not behold herself, had taken possession of the young man. He had fallen ill ; he would nurse himself ; misjudged the quantity of a remedy devised by the skill of a practitioner well known on the walls of Paris, and succumbed

to the effects of an overdose of mercury. His corpse was as black as a mole's back. A devil had left unmistakable traces of its passage there; could it have been Ashtaroth?

"The estimable youth to whom you refer has been carried away to the planet Mercury," said the head clerk to a German demonologist who came to investigate the matter at first hand.

"I am quite prepared to believe it," answered the Teuton.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir," returned the other. "The opinion you advance coincides with the very words of Jacob Boehme. In the forty-eighth proposition of 'The Threefold Life of Man,' he says that 'if God hath brought all things to pass with a LET THERE BE, the FIAT is the secret matrix which comprehends and apprehends the nature which is formed by the spirit born of Mercury and of God.'"

"What do you say, sir?"

The German delivered his quotation afresh.

"We do not know it," said the clerks.

"Fiat?" said the clerk. "*Fiat lux!*"

"You can verify the citation for yourselves," said the German. "You will find the passage in the 'Treatise of the Threefold Life of Man,' page 75; the edition was published by M. Mignaret in 1809. It was translated into French by a philosopher who had a great admiration for the famous shoemaker."

"Oh! he was a shoemaker, was he?" said the head clerk.

"In Prussia," said the German.

"Did he work for the King of Prussia?" inquired a Boeotian of a second clerk.

"He must have vamped up his prose," said a third.

"That man is colossal," cried the fourth, pointing to the Teuton.

That gentleman, though a demonologist of the first rank, did not know the amount of devilry to be found in a

*MELMOTH RECONCILED.*

tary's clerk. He went away without the least idea that they were making game of him, and fully under the impression that the young fellows regarded Boehme as a colossal genius.

"Education is making strides in France," said he to himself.

PARIS, *May* 6, 1835.



## THE RED HOUSE.

(*L'Auberge rouge.*)

*To Monsieur le Marquis de Custine.*

ONCE upon a time (I forget the exact year) a Parisian banker, who had very extensive business relations with Germany, gave a dinner party in honor of one of the friends that merchants make in this place and that by correspondence, a sort of friendship that subsists for a long while between men who have never met. The friend, the senior partner of some considerable firm in Nuremberg, was a stout, good-natured German, a man of learning and of taste, more particularly in the matter of tobacco pipes. He was a typical Nuremberger, with a pleasant, broad countenance and a massive, square forehead, with a few stray fair hairs here and there; a typical German, a son of the stainless and noble Fatherland, so fertile in honorable characters, preserving its manners uncorrupted even after seven invasions. The stranger laughed simply, listened attentively, and drank with marked enjoyment, seeming to like champagne perhaps as well as the pale red wines of the Johannisberg. Like nearly every German in nearly every book, he was named Hermann; and in the quality of a man who does nothing with levity, he was comfortably seated at the banker's table, eating his way through the dinner with the Teutonic appetite renowned all over Europe, and thorough indeed was his manner of bidding adieu to all the works of the great Carême.

The master of the house had invited several intimate friends to do honor to his guest. These were for the most part capitalists or merchants, interspersed with a few pretty and agreeable women, whose light, graceful talk and frank manner



harmonized with German openheartedness. And, indeed, if you could have seen, as I had the pleasure of seeing, this blithe gathering of folk who had sheathed the active claws employed in raking-in wealth, that they might make the best of an opportunity of enjoying the pleasures of life, you would scarcely have found it in your heart to grudge high rates of interest or to revile defaulters. A man cannot always be in mischief. Even in the society of pirates, for instance, there must surely be a pleasant hour now and then when you may feel at your ease beneath the black flag.

“Oh, I do hope that before M. Hermann goes he will tell us another dreadful, thrilling German story!”

The words were uttered over the dessert by a pale, fair-haired young lady, who had doubtless been reading Hoffmann's tales and Sir Walter Scott's novels. She was the banker's only daughter, an irresistibly charming girl, whose education was being finished at the Gymnase; she was wild about the plays given there. The dinner party had just reached the period of lazy content and serene disinclination to talk that succeeds an excellent dinner in the course of which somewhat heavy demands have been made upon the digestion; when the guests lean back in their chairs and play idly with the gilded knife-blades, while their wrists repose lightly on the table edge; the period of decline when some torment apple pips, or knead a crumb of bread between thumb and finger, when the sentimental write illegible initials among the *débris* of the dessert, and the penurious count the stones on their plates, and arrange them round the edge, as a playwright marshals the supernumeraries at the back of the stage. These are minor gastronomical pleasures which Brillat-Savarin has passed over unnoticed, exhaustively as he has treated his subject in other respects.

The servants had disappeared. The dessert, like a squadron after an action, was quite disorganized, disarrayed, forlorn. In spite of persistent efforts on the part of the mistress of the

house, the various dishes strayed about the table. People fixed their eyes on the Swiss views that adorned the gray walls of the dining-room. No one felt it tedious. The man has yet to be found who can mope while he digests a good dinner. At that time we like to sit steeped in an indescribable calm, a sort of golden mean between the two extremes of the thinker's musings and the sleek content of the ruminating brute, which should be termed the physical melancholy of gastronomy.

So the party turned spontaneously towards the worthy German, all of them delighted to listen to a tale, even if it should be a dull one. During this beatific pause, the mere sound of the voice of the one who tells the story is soothing to our languid senses; it is one more aid to passive enjoyment. As an amateur of pictures, I watched the faces, bright with smiles, lit up by the light of the tapers and flushed with good-cheer; the different expressions produced piquant effects among the sconces, the porcelain baskets of fruit, and the crystal glasses.

One face, exactly opposite, particularly struck my imagination. It belonged to a middle-sized man, tolerably stout and jovial-looking; who, from his manner and appearance, seemed to be a stockbroker, and, so far as one could see, gifted with no extraordinary amount of brains. Hitherto I had not noticed him, but at that moment his face, obscured, to be sure, by a bad light, seemed to me to undergo a total change; it took a cadaverous hue, veined with purple streaks. You might have taken it for the ghastly countenance of a man in the death agony. Impassive as a painted figure in a diorama, he was staring stupidly at the facets of a crystal decanter-stopper, but he certainly took no heed of them; he seemed to be deep in some visionary contemplation of the future or of the past. A long scrutiny of this dubious-looking face made me think.

"Is he ill?" I asked myself. "Has he taken too much wine? Is he ruined by the fall of the funds? Is he thinking

how to cheat his creditors? Look!" I said to a lady who sat next to me, calling her attention to the stranger's face, "that is a budding bankruptcy, is it not?"

"Oh!" she answered, "if it were, he would be in better spirits." Then, with a graceful toss of her head, she added: "If that individual ever ruins himself, I will take the news to Pekin myself. He is a rather eccentric old gentleman worth a million in real estate; he used to be a contractor to the imperial armies. He married again as a business speculation, but he makes his wife very happy for all that. He has a pretty daughter, whom for a very long time he would not recognize; but when his son died by a sad accident in a duel, he was obliged to take her home, for he was not likely to have any more children. So all at once the poor girl became one of the richest heiresses in Paris. The loss of his only son threw the poor dear man into great grief, and he still shows signs of it at times."

As she spoke the army-contractor looked up, and our eyes met; his expression made me shudder, it was so gloomy and so sad. Assuredly a whole life was summed up in that glance. Then in a moment he looked cheerful. He took up the glass stopper, put it unthinkingly into the mouth of the water decanter that stood on the table in front of him, and turned smilingly towards M. Hermann. The man was positively beaming with full-fed content, and had, no doubt, not two ideas in his head; he had been thinking of nothing! I was to some extent ashamed to have thrown away my powers of divination *in anima vili*, to have taken this thick-skulled capitalist as a subject. But while I was making my phrenological observations in pure waste, the good-natured German had flicked a few grains of snuff off his face and begun his story.

It would be a somewhat difficult matter to give it in the same words, with his not infrequent interruptions and wordy digressions; so I have written it after my own fashion, omitting

these defects of the Nuremberger's narrative, and helping myself to such elements of poetry and interest as it may possess, emulating the modesty of other writers who omit the formula: "Translated from the German," from their title-pages.

## I. THE IDEA AND THE DEED.

"Towards the end of Vendémiaire, in the year VII. of the Republican era (a date that corresponds to the 20th of October, present style), two young men were making their way towards Andernach, a little town on the left bank of the Rhine, a few leagues from Coblentz. The travelers had set out from Bonn that morning, and now the day was drawing to a close. At that particular time a French army under command of General Augereau was keeping in check the Austrians on the right bank of the river. The headquarters of the Republican division were at Coblentz, and one of the demi-brigades belonging to Augereau's corps was quartered in Andernach.

"The two wayfarers were Frenchmen. At first sight of their blue and white uniforms, with red velvet facings, their sabres, and, above all, their caps covered with green oilcloth and adorned with a tricolor cockade, the German peasants themselves might have known them for a pair of army surgeons, men of science and of sterling worth, popular for the most part not only in the army, but also in the countries occupied by French troops. At that time many young men of good family, torn from their medical studies by General Jourdan's conscription law, not unnaturally preferred to continue their studies on the battlefield to compulsory service in the ranks, a life ill suited to their antecedents and unwarlike ambitions. Men of this stamp, studious, serviceable, peaceably inclined, did some good among so many evils, and found

congenial spirits among the learned of the various countries invaded by the ruthless enfranchisement of the Republic.

"These two, provided with a route of the road, and with assistant surgeons' commissions signed by La Coste and Bernadotte, were on their way to join the demi-brigade to which they were attached. Both belonged to well-to-do families in Beauvais, and traditions of gentle breeding and of provincial integrity had been a part of their inheritance. A curiosity quite natural in youth had brought them to the seat of war before the time fixed for entrance on active service, and they had come by the *diligence* as far as Strasbourg. Maternal prudence had suffered them to leave home with a very scanty supply of money, but they felt rich in the possession of a few louis; and, indeed, at a time when assignats had reached the lowest point of depreciation, those few louis meant wealth, for gold was at a high premium.

"The two assistant surgeons, aged twenty years at most, gave themselves up to the romance of their situation with all the enthusiasm of youth. They had traversed the Palatinate from Strasbourg to Bonn in the quality of artists, philosophers, and observers. When we have a scientific career before us, there are, in truth, at that age many natures within us; and even while making love or traveling about, an assistant surgeon should be laying the foundations of his future fame and fortune. Accordingly, the pair had been carried away by the profound admiration that every well-read man must feel at the sight of the scenery of Swabia and the banks of the Rhine between Mayence and Cologne. They saw a vigorous and fertile country, an undulating green landscape full of strong contrasts and memories of feudal times, and everywhere scarred by fire and sword. Louis XIV. and Turenne once before laid that fair land in ashes; heaps of ruins bear witness to the pride, or, it may be, to the prudence of the monarch of Versailles, who rased the wonderful castles which once were the glory of this part of Germany. You arrive at some con-

ception of the German mind ; you understand its dreaminess and its mysticism from this wonderful forest-land of theirs, full of remains of the middle ages, picturesque, albeit in ruins.

"The two friends had made some stay in Bonn with two objects in view—scientific knowledge and pleasure. The grand hospital of the Gallo-Batavian army and of Augereau's division had been established in the Electoral palace itself, and thither the two novices had gone to see their comrades, to deliver letters of recommendation to their chiefs, and to make their first acquaintance with the life of army surgeons. But with the new impressions, there as elsewhere, they parted with some of their national prejudices, and discovered that France had no monopoly of beautiful public buildings and landscapes. The marble columns that adorn the Electoral palace took them by surprise ; they admired the magnificence of German architecture and found fresh treasures of ancient and modern art at every step.

"Now and again in the course of their wanderings towards Andernach their way led them over some higher peak among the granite hills. Through a clear space in the forest, or a chasm in the rocks, they caught a glimpse of the Rhine, a picture framed in the gray stone, or in some setting of luxuriant trails of green leaves. Every valley, field-path, and forest was filled with autumn scents that conduce to musings and with signs of the aging of the year ; the tree-tops were turning golden, taking warmer hues and shades of brown ; the leaves were falling, but the sky was blue and cloudless overhead ; the roads were dry, and shone like threads of gold across the country in the late afternoon sunlight.

"Half a league from Andernach, the country through which the two friends were traveling lay in a silence as deep as if there were no war laying waste the beautiful land. They were following a goat track among the steep crags of bluish granite that rise like walls above the eddying Rhine, and before very long were descending the sloping sides of the ravine above

the little town, nestling coily at its foot on the river bank, its picturesque quay for the Rhine boatmen.

"Germany is a very beautiful country!" cried one of the two, Prosper Magnan by name, as he caught sight of the painted houses of Andernach lying close together like eggs in a basket, among the trees and flower-gardens.

"For a few minutes they looked at the high-pitched roofs with their projecting beams, at the balconies and wooden staircases of all those peaceful dwellings, and at the boats swaying in the currents by the quay."

When M. Hermann mentioned the name of Prosper Magnan, my opposite neighbor, the army-contractor, snatched up the decanter, poured himself out a glass of water, and drank it down at a gulp. This proceeding called my attention to him; I thought I saw a slight quiver in his hands and a trace of perspiration on his forehead.

"What is the army-contractor's name?" I inquired of my gracious neighbor.

"His name is Taillefer," said she.

"Are you feeling unwell?" I exclaimed, as this unaccountable being turned pale.

"Not at all, not at all," he said, with a courteous gesture of acknowledgment. "I am listening," he said, with a nod to the rest of the party, for all eyes were turned at once upon him.

"I forget the other young man's name," said M. Hermann. "But, at any rate, from Prosper Magnan's confidences I learned that his friend was dark, lively, and rather thin. If you have no objection, I will call him Wilhelm for the sake of clearness in the story." And the good German took up his tale again, again baptizing a French assistant surgeon with a German name, totally regardless of local color and of the demands of romanticism.

"So by the time these two young fellows reached Andernach night had fallen; and they, fancying that it was too late to

report themselves to their chiefs, make themselves known and obtain billets in a place already full of soldiers, made up their minds to spend their last night of freedom in an inn, about a hundred paces outside the town. They had seen it from the crags above, and had admired the warm colors of the house, heightened by the glow of the sunset. The whole building was painted red, and produced a piquant effect in the landscape, whether it was seen against the crowd of houses in the town, or as a mass of bright color against a background of forest trees, or a patch of scarlet by the gray water's edge. Doubtless the inn owed its external decoration, and consequently its name, to the whim of the builder in some forgotten time. The color had come to be literally a matter of custom to successive owners, for the inn had a name among the Rhine boatmen who frequented it. The sound of horses' hoofs brought the landlord of the Red House to the threshold.

" '*Pardieu !* gentlemen,' cried he, 'a little later you would have had to sleep out of doors like most of your countrymen bivouacking yonder at the other end of Andernach. The house is full. If you positively must have a bed to sleep in, I have only my own room to offer you. As for the horses, I can lay down some litter in a corner of the yard for them; my stables are full of christened men this day. You gentlemen are from France?' he went on after a brief pause.

" 'From Bonn,' cried Prosper, 'and we have had nothing to eat since morning.'

" 'Oh! as to victuals,' said the landlord, jerking his head, 'people come to the Red House for ten leagues round for wedding feasts. You shall have a banquet fit for a prince, fish from the Rhine! That tells you everything.'

"When they had given over their tired beasts into the host's care, they left him to shout in vain for the stable folk, and went into the public room of the inn. It was so full of dense white clouds blown from the pipes of a roomful of smokers that at first they could not make out what kind of



company they had fallen among; but after they had sat for a while at a table, and put in practice the patience of traveled philosophers who know when it is useless to make a fuss, they gradually made out the inevitable accessories of a German inn. The stove, the clock, the tables, pots of beer and long pipes, loomed out through the tobacco smoke; so did the faces of the motley crew, Jews, Germans, and whatnot, with one or two rough boatmen thrown in.

"The epaulettes of a few French officers shone through the thick mist, and spurs and sabres clanked incessantly upon the flagstones. Some were playing at cards, the rest quarreled among themselves, or were silent, ate, or drank, and came or went. A stout little woman, who wore the black velvet cap, blue stomacher embroidered with silver, the pin-cushion, bunch of keys, silver clasps, and plaited hair of the typical German landlady (a costume made so familiar in all its details by a host of prints that it is too well known to need description), came to the two friends and soothed their impatience, while she stimulated their interest in their supper with very remarkable skill.

"Gradually the noise diminished, the travelers went off one by one, the clouds of tobacco smoke cleared away. By the time that the table was set for the assistant surgeons, and the classic carp from the Rhine appeared, it was eleven o'clock, and the room was empty. Through the stillness of the night it was possible to hear faint noises of horses stamping or crunching their provender, the ripple of the Rhine, the vague indefinable sounds in an inn full of people when every one has retired to rest. Doors and windows opened or shut; there was an inarticulate murmur of voices, or a name was called out in some room overhead. During this time of silence and of commotion, while the two Frenchmen were eating their supper and the landlord engaged in extolling Andernach, the meal, his Rhine wine, his wife, and the Republican army, for the benefit of his guests, the three

heard, with a certain degree of interest, the hoarse shouts of boatmen and the rattling sound of a boat being moored alongside the quay. The innkeeper, doubtless accustomed to be hailed by the guttural cries of the boatmen, hurried out, and soon came in again with a short, stout man, a couple of the boat's crew following them with a heavy valise and several packages. As soon as the baggage was deposited in the room, the short man picked up his valise and seated himself without ceremony at the table opposite the two surgeons.

"‘You can sleep on board,’ said he to the boatmen, ‘as the inn is full. All things considered, that will be the best way.’

"‘All the provisions I have in the house are here before you, sir,’ said the landlord, and he indicated the Frenchmen’s supper. ‘I have not a crust of bread, and not so much as a bone——’

"‘And no sauerkraut?’

"‘Not so much as would fill my wife’s thimble! As I had the honor of telling you just now, you can have no bed but the chair you are sitting on, and this is the only unoccupied room.’

"At these words the short personage glanced at the landlord, at the room, and at the two Frenchmen, caution and alarm equally visible in the expression of his countenance.

"At this point," said M. Hermann, interrupting himself, "I should tell you that we never knew this stranger’s real name, nor his history; we found out from his papers that he came from Aix-la-Chapelle, that he had assumed the name of Walhenfer, and owned a rather large pin-factory somewhere near Neuwied—that was all.

"He wore, like other manufacturers in that part of the world, an ordinary cloth overcoat, waistcoat, and breeches of dark-green velvet, high boots, and a broad leather belt. His face was perfectly round, his manners frank and hearty, and during the evening he found it very difficult to disguise some

inward apprehensions, or, it may be, cruel anxieties. The innkeeper always said that the German merchant was flying the country, and I learned later on that his factory had been burned down through one of the unlucky accidents so frequent in time of war. But in spite of the uneasy look that his face generally wore, its natural expression denoted good-humor and good-nature. He had good features, and a particularly noticeable personal trait was a thick neck, so white in contrast with a black cravat, that Wilhelm jokingly pointed it out to Prosper——”

Here M. Taillefer drank another glass of water.

“Prosper courteously invited the merchant to share their supper, and Walhenfer fell to without more ado, like a man who is conscious that he can repay a piece of civility. He set down his valise on the floor, put his feet upon it, took off his hat, drew his chair to the table, and laid down his gloves beside him, together with a pair of pistols, which he carried in his belt. The landlord quickly laid a cover for him, and the three began to satisfy their hunger silently enough.

“The room was so close and the flies so troublesome that Prosper besought the landlord to open the window that looked out upon the quay to let in fresh air. This window was fastened by an iron bar that dropped into a socket on either side of the window frame, and for greater security a nut fastened to each of the shutters received a bolt. It so happened that Prosper watched the landlord unfasten the window.

“But since I am going into these particulars,” M. Hermann remarked, “I ought to describe the internal arrangements of the house ; for the whole interest of the story depends on an accurate knowledge of the place.

“There were two entrance doors in the room where these three personages were sitting. One opened on to the road that followed the river bank to Andernach, and, as might be expected, just opposite the inn, there was a little jetty where

the boat which the merchant had hired for his voyage was moored at that moment. The other door gave admittance to the inn-yard, a court shut in by very high walls, and at the moment full of horses and cattle, for human beings occupied the stables.

"The house-door had been so carefully bolted and barred that, to save time, the landlord had opened the street-door of the sitting-room to admit the merchant and the boatmen, and now, when he had opened the window at Prosper Magnan's instance, he set to work to shut this door, slipping the bolts and screwing the nuts.

"The landlord's bedroom, where the friends were to sleep, was next to the public room of the inn, and only separated from the kitchen, where the host and hostess were probably to pass the night, by a sufficiently thin partition wall. The maidservant had just gone out to find a nook in some manger, or in the corner of a hayloft somewhere or other. It will be readily understood that the public room, the landlord's bedroom, and the kitchen were in a manner apart from the rest of the inn. The deep barking of two great dogs in the yard indicated that the house had vigilant and wakeful guardians.

"'How quiet it is, and what a glorious night!' said Wilhelm, looking out at the sky when the landlord had bolted the door. There was not a sound to be heard at the moment save the rippling of the water.

"'Gentlemen,' said the merchant, addressing the Frenchmen, 'allow me to offer you a bottle or two of wine to wash down your carp. A glass will refresh us after a tiring day. By the look of you and the condition of your clothes, I can see that, like myself, you have come a good way.'

"The two friends accepted the proposal, and the landlord went out through the kitchen to the cellar, doubtless situated beneath that part of the establishment. About the time that five venerable bottles appeared upon the table, the landlord's wife had finished serving the supper. She gave a housewife's

glance over the dishes and round the room, assured herself that the travelers had everything they were likely to want, and went back to the kitchen. The four boon companions, for the host was asked to join the party, did not hear her go off to bed; but before long, in the pauses of the chat over the wine, there came an occasional very distinct sound of snoring from the loft above the kitchen where she was sleeping, a sound rendered still more resonant by reason of the thin plank floor. This made the guests smile, and the landlord smiled still more.

"Towards midnight, when there was nothing left on the table but cheese and biscuits, dried fruit, and good wine, the whole party, and the young Frenchmen more particularly, grew communicative. They talked about their country, their studies, and the war. After a while the conversation grew lively. Prosper Magnan drew tears to the merchant's eyes when, with a Picard's frankness and the simplicity of a kindly and affectionate nature, he began to imagine what his mother would be doing while he, her son, was here on the bank of the Rhine.

" 'It is just as if I can see her,' he said; 'she is reading the evening prayer, the last thing at night! She will not forget me I know; she is sure to say, "Where is my poor Prosper, I wonder?" Then if she has won a few sous at cards—of *your* mother perhaps,' he added, jogging Wilhelm's elbow—'she will be putting them in the big red jar, where she keeps the money she is saving up to buy those thirty acres that lie within her own little bit of land at Lescheville. The thirty acres will be worth something like sixty thousand francs. Good meadow land it is! Ah! if I were to have it some day, I would live all the rest of my life at Lescheville, and want nothing better! How often my father wanted those thirty acres and the nice little stream that winds along through the fields! And, after all, he died and could not buy the land. I have played there many and many a time!'

“ ‘M. Walhenfer, haven't you also your *hoc erat in votis* ? ’ asked Wilhelm.

“ ‘Yes, sir, yes ! But it all came to me just as it was, and now——’ the good man stopped short and said no more.

“ ‘For my own part,’ said the landlord, whose countenance was slightly flushed, ‘I bought a bit of meadow last year that I had set my mind on these ten years past.’

“ ‘So they chatted on, as folk will talk when wine has unloosed their tongues, and struck up one of those travelers' friendships that we are a little chary of making on a journey, in such a way that when they rose to go to their room Wilhelm offered his bed to the merchant.

“ ‘You can take the offer without hesitation,’ he said, ‘for Prosper and I can sleep together. It will not be the first time nor the last either, I expect. You are the oldest among us, and we ought to honor old age.’

“ ‘Pooh ! ’ said the landlord, ‘there are several mattresses on our bed, one can be laid on the floor for you,’ and he went to shut the window with the usual clatter caused by this precaution.

“ ‘I accept your offer,’ said the merchant, addressing Wilhelm. ‘I confess,’ he added, lowering his voice, and looking at the friends, ‘that I wanted you to make it. I feel that I cannot trust my boatmen ; and I am not sorry to find myself in the company of two decent young fellows, two French military men, moreover, for the night. I have a hundred thousand francs in gold and diamonds in that valise.’

“ ‘The two younger men received this incautious communication with a discreet friendliness that reassured the worthy German. The landlord helped his guests to shift one of the mattresses, and, when things had been arranged as comfortably as possible, wished them good-night and went off to bed. The merchant and the surgeons joked each other about their pillows. Prosper put Wilhelm's case of surgical instruments, as well as his own, under the mattress, to raise the end

and supply the place of a bolster, just as Walhenfer, in an excess of extreme caution, bestowed his valise in a like manner.

“‘We are both going to sleep on our fortunes—you on your money, and I on my case of instruments! It remains to be seen whether my case will bring me in as much money as you have made.’

“‘You may hope so,’ said the merchant. ‘Honest work will accomplish most things, but you must have patience.’

“Before very long Walhenfer and Wilhelm fell asleep. But whether it was because his bed was too hard, or he himself was overtired and wakeful, or through some unlucky mood of mind, Prosper Magnan lay wide awake. Imperceptibly his thoughts took an ill turn. He could think of nothing but that hundred thousand francs beneath the merchant’s pillow. For him a hundred thousand francs was a vast fortune ready made. He began by laying out the money in endless ways, building castles in the air, as we are all apt to do with so much enjoyment just before we drop off to sleep, when indistinct and hazy ideas arise in our minds, and not seldom night and silence give a magical vividness to our thoughts.

“In these visions Prosper Magnan overtopped his mother’s ambitions; he bought the thirty acres of meadow, and married a young lady in Beauvais, to whose hand he could not aspire at present owing to inequality of fortune. With this wealth he planned out a whole pleasant lifetime, saw himself the prosperous father of a family, rich, looked up to in the neighborhood, possibly even mayor of Beauvais. The Picard head was on fire; he cast about for the means of realizing these dreams of his. With extraordinary warmth of imagination he set himself to plan out a crime, and gold and diamonds were the most vivid and distinct portion of a vision of the merchant’s death; the glitter-dazzled him. His heart beat fast. He had committed a crime, no doubt, by harboring such thoughts as these. The spell of the gold was upon him; his

moral nature was intoxicated by insidious reasonings. He asked himself whether there was any reason why the poor German should live, and imagined how it would have been if he had never existed. To put it briefly, he plotted out a way to do the deed with complete impunity.

"The Austrians held the other bank of the Rhine; a boat lay there under the windows; there were boatmen there; he could cut the man's throat, fling him into the Rhine, escape with the valise through a casement, bribe the boatmen, and go over to the Austrian side. He even went so far as to count upon his surgeon's dexterity with the knife; he knew of a way of decapitating his victim before the sleeper could utter a single shriek."

M. Taillefer wiped his forehead at this point, and again he drank a little water.

"Then Prosper Magnan rose—slowly and noiselessly. He assured himself that he had awakened nobody, dressed and went into the public room. Then, with the fatal lucidity of mind that suddenly comes at certain crises, with the heightened power of intuition and strength of will that is never lacking to criminals or to prisoners in the execution of their designs, he unscrewed the iron bars, and drew them from their sockets, and set them against the wall without the slightest sound, hanging with all his weight on to the shutters lest they should creak as they turned on their hinges. In the pale moonlight he could dimly see the objects in the room where Wilhelm and Walhenfer were sleeping.

"Then, he told me, he stopped short for a moment. His heart beat so hard and so heavily that the sound seemed to ring through the room, and he stood like one dismayed as he heard it. He began to fear for his coolness; his hands shook, he felt as if he were standing on burning coals. But so fair a prospect depended upon the execution of his design that he saw something like a providence in this dispensation of fate that had brought the merchant thither. He opened the win-



dow, went back to his room, took up his case, and looked through it for an instrument best adapted to his purpose.

“ ‘And when I stood by the bed ’ (he told me this), ‘ I asked God for His protection, unthinkingly.’

“ He had just raised his arm, and was summoning all his strength for the blow, when something like a voice cried within him, and he thought he saw a light. He flung down the surgical instrument on his bed, fled into the next room, and stood at the window. A profound horror of himself came over him, and feeling how little he could trust himself, fearing to yield to the fascination that held him, he sprang quickly out of the window and walked along by the Rhine, acting as sentinel, as it were, before the inn. Again and again he walked restlessly to and from Andernach, often also his wanderings led him to the slope of the ravine which they had descended that afternoon to reach the inn ; but so deep was the silence of the night, and so strong his dread of arousing the watch-dogs, that he kept away from the Red House, and lost sight altogether more than once of the window that he had left open. He tried to weary himself out, and so to induce sleep. Yet, as he walked to and fro under the cloudless sky, watching the brilliant stars, it may be that the pure night air and the melancholy lapping of the water wrought upon him and restored him by degrees to moral sanity. Sober reason completed the work and dispelled that short-lived madness. His education, the precepts of religion, and, above all things (so he told me), visions of the homely life that he had led beneath his father’s roof, got the better of his evil thoughts. He thought and pondered for long, his elbow resting on a boulder by the side of the Rhine ; and when he turned to go in again, he could not only have slept, so he said, but have watched over millions of gold.

“ When his honesty emerged strengthened and triumphant from that ordeal, he knelt in joy and ecstasy to thank God ; he felt as happy, light-hearted, and contented as on the day

when he took the sacrament for the first time, and felt not unworthy of the angels because he had spent the day without sin in thought, or word, or deed.

"He went back again to the inn, shut the window without care to move noiselessly, and went to bed at once. Mind and body were utterly exhausted, and sleep overcame him. He had scarcely laid his head on the mattress before the dreamy drowsiness that precedes sound slumber crept over him ; when the senses grow torpid, conscious life ebbs away, thought grows fragmentary, and the last communications of sense to the brain are like the impressions of a dream.

" 'How close the air is !' said Prosper to himself. 'It is just as if I were breathing a damp mist——'

"Dimly he sought to account for this state of things by attributing it to the difference between the outside temperature in the pure country air and the closed room ; but before long he heard a constantly recurring sound, very much like the slow drip of water from a leaking tap. On an impulse of panic terror, he thought of rising and calling the landlord, or the merchant, or Wilhelm ; but, for his misfortune, he be-thought himself of the wooden clock in the next room, fancied that the sound was the beat of the pendulum, and dropped off to sleep with this dim and confused idea in his head."

"Do you want some water, M. Taillefer ?" asked the master of the house, seeing the banker take up the empty decanter mechanically.

M. Hermann went on with his story after the slight interruption of the banker's reply.

"The next morning," he went on, "Prosper Magnan was awakened by a great noise. It seemed to him that he had heard shrill cries, and he felt that violent nervous tremor which we experience when we wake to a painful sensation that began during slumber. The thing that takes place in us when we 'wake with a start,' to use the common expression,

has been insufficiently investigated, though it presents interesting problems to physiological science. The terrible shock, caused it may be by the too sudden reunion of the two natures in us that are almost always apart while we sleep, is usually momentary, but it was not so for the unlucky young surgeon. The horror grew, and his hair bristled hideously all at once, when he saw a pool of blood between his own mattress and Walhenfer's bedstead. The unfortunate German's head was lying on the floor, the body was still on the bed, all this blood had drained from the neck. Prosper Magnan saw Walhenfer's eyes unclosed and staring, saw red on the sheets that he had slept in, and even on his own hands, saw his own surgeon's knife on the bed, and fainted away on the blood-stained floor.

" 'I was punished already for my thoughts,' he said to me afterwards.

"When he came to himself again, he was sitting in a chair in the public room of the inn, a group of French soldiers round about him, and an inquisitive and interested crowd. He stared in dull bewilderment at a Republican officer who was busy taking down the depositions of several witnesses and drawing up an official report; he recognized the landlord and his wife, the two boatmen, and the maidservant. The surgical instrument used by the murderer——"

Here M. Taillefer coughed, drew out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. His movements were so natural that I alone noticed them; indeed, all eyes were fixed on M. Hermann with a kind of greedy interest. The army-contractor leaned his elbow on the table, propped his head on his right hand, and looked fixedly at Hermann. From that time forward I saw no involuntary signs of agitation nor of interest in the tale, but his face was grave and corpse-like; he looked just as he had done while he was playing with the decanter-stopper.

"The surgical instrument used by the murderer lay on the

table, beside the case with Prosper's pocket-book and papers. The crowd looked by turns at the young surgeon and at these convincing proofs of his guilt; he himself appeared to be dying; his dull eyes seemed to have no power of sight in them. A confused murmur outside made it evident that a crowd had gathered about the inn, attracted by the news of the murder, and perhaps by a wish to catch a sight of the criminal. The tramp of the sentries posted under the windows and the clanking of their weapons rose over the whispered talk of the populace. The inn itself was shut up, the courtyard was silent and deserted.

"The gaze of the officer who was drawing up the report was intolerable; Prosper Magnan felt some one grasp his hand; looked up to see who it was that stood by him among that unfriendly crowd, and recognized, by the uniform that he wore, the senior surgeon of the demi-brigade quartered in Andernach. So keen and merciless were those eyes that the poor young fellow shuddered, and his head dropped on to the back of the chair. One of the men held vinegar for him to inhale, and Prosper regained consciousness at once; but his haggard eyes were so destitute of life and intelligence that the senior surgeon felt his pulse, and spoke to the officer:

" 'Captain,' he said, 'it is impossible to examine the man just now——'

" 'Very well. Take him away,' returned the captain, cutting the surgeon short, and speaking to a corporal who stood behind the junior's chair.

" 'Confounded scoundrel!' the man muttered; 'try at least to hold up your head before these German beggars, to save the honor of the Republic.'

" Thus adjured, Prosper Magnan came to his senses, rose, and went forward a few paces; but when the door opened, when he felt the outer air, and saw the people crowding up, all his strength failed him, his knees bent under him, he tottered.

“ ‘The confounded sawbones deserves to be put an end to twice over! March, can’t you!’ said the two men on either side of him, on whom he leaned.

“ ‘Oh, the coward! the coward! Here he comes! here he comes! There he is!’

“The words were uttered as by one voice, the clamorous voice of the mob who hemmed him in, insulting and reviling him at every step. During the time that it took to go from the inn to the prison, the trampling feet of the crowd and the soldiers who guarded him, the muttered talk of those about him, the sky above, the morning air, the streets of Andernach, the rippling murmur of the current of the Rhine, all reached him as dull, vague impressions, confused and dim, like all his experiences since his awakening. At times he thought that he had ceased to exist, so he told me afterwards.

“I myself was in prison just then,” said M. Hermann, interrupting himself. “We are all enthusiasts at twenty. I was on fire to defend my country, and commanded a volunteer troop raised in and about Andernach. A short time previously, I managed to fall in one night with a French detachment of eight hundred men. There were two hundred of us at the most; my scouts had betrayed me. I was thrown into the prison at Andernach while they debated whether or no to have me shot by way of a warning to the country. The French, moreover, talked of reprisals, but the murder for which they had a mind to avenge themselves on me turned out to have been committed outside the Electorate. My father had obtained a reprieve of three days, to make application for my pardon to General Augereau, who granted it.

“So I saw Prosper Magnan as soon as I came into the prison at Andernach, and the first sight of him filled me with the deepest pity for him. Haggard, exhausted, and blood-stained though he was, there was a certain frankness in his face that convinced me of his innocence, and made a deep

impression upon me. It was as if Germany stood there visibly before me—the prisoner with the long, fair hair and blue eyes was for my imagination the very personification of the prostrate Fatherland—this was no murderer, but a victim. As he went past my window, a sad, bitter smile lit up his face for a moment, as if a transitory gleam of sanity crossed a disordered brain. Such a smile would surely not be seen on a murderer's lips. When I next saw the turnkey, I asked him about his new prisoner.

“‘He hasn't said a word since he went into his cell. He sits there with his head on his hands, and sleeps or thinks about his trouble. From what I hear the Frenchmen saying, they will settle his case to-morrow, and he will be shot within twenty-four hours.’

“That evening I lingered a little under his windows during the short time allowed for exercise in the prison-yard. We talked together, and he told me very simply the story of his ill-luck, giving sufficiently straightforward answers to my different questions. After that conversation I no longer doubted his innocence. I asked and obtained the favor of spending a few hours in his company, and saw him in this way several times. The poor boy let me into the secret of his thoughts without reserve. In his own opinion, he was at once innocent and guilty. He remembered the hideous temptation which he had found strength to resist, and was afraid that he had committed the murder planned while he was awake in an access of somnambulism.

“‘But how about your companion?’ said I.

“‘Oh, Wilhelm is incapable!——’ he cried vehemently. He did not even finish the sentence. I grasped his hand at the warm-hearted outburst, so fraught with youth and virtue.

“‘I expect he was frightened when he woke,’ he said; ‘he must have lost his presence of mind and fled——’

“‘Without waking you?’ I asked. ‘Why, in that case

your defence is soon made, for Walhenfer's valise will not have been stolen.'

"All at once he burst into tears.

"'Oh, yes, yes!' he cried; 'I am not guilty. I cannot have killed him. I remember the dreams I had. I was at school, playing at prisoners-base. I could not have cut his throat while I was dreaming of running about.'

"But in spite of the gleams of hope that quieted his mind somewhat at times, he still felt crushed by the weight of remorse. There was no blinking the fact he had raised his arm to strike the blow. He condemned himself, and considered that he was morally guilty after committing the crime in imagination.

"'And yet, I am not a bad fellow,' he cried. 'Oh, poor mother! Perhaps just now she is happily playing at cards with her friends in the little tapestried room at home. If she knew that I had so much as raised my hand to take another man's life—Oh! it would kill her! And I am in prison, and accused of murder! If I did not kill the man, I shall certainly be the death of my mother!'

"He shed no tears as he spoke. In a wild fit of frenzy, not uncommon among Picards, he sprang up, and, if I had not forcibly restrained him, would have dashed his head against the wall.

"'Wait until you have been tried,' I said. 'You will be acquitted; you are innocent. And your mother——'

"'My mother,' he cried wildly; 'my mother will hear that I have been accused of murder, that is the main point. You always hear things like that in little places, and my poor mother will die of grief. Besides, I am not innocent. Do you care to know the whole truth! I feel that I have lost the virginity of my conscience.'

"With those terrible words, he sat down, folded his arms across his chest, bowed his head, and fixed his eyes gloomily on the floor. Just then the turnkey came to bid me return to

my cell ; but loth to leave my companion when his discouragement seemed at its blackest, I clasped him in a friendly embrace. 'Be patient,' I said, 'perhaps it will all come right. If an honest man's opinion can silence your doubts, I tell you this—that I esteem you and love you. Accept my friendship and repose on my heart, if you cannot feel at peace with your own.'

"On the following day, about nine o'clock, a corporal and four fusiliers came for the assistant surgeon. I heard the sound of the soldiers' footsteps, and went to the window ; our eyes met as he crossed the court. Never shall I forget the glance fraught with so many thoughts and forebodings, nor the resignation and indescribably sad and melancholy sweetness in his expression. In that dumb swift transference of thought my friend conveyed his testament to me ; he left his lost life to the one friend who was beside him at the last.

"That night must have been very hard to live through, a very lonely night for him ; but perhaps the pallor that overspread his face was a sign of a newly-acquired stoicism, based on a new view of himself. Perhaps he felt purified by remorse, and thought to expiate his sin in this anguish and shame. He walked with a firm step ; and I noticed that he had removed the accidental stains of blood that soiled his clothing the night before.

"'Unluckily I stained my hands while I was asleep ; I always was an uneasy sleeper,' he had said, a dreadful despair in the tones of his voice.

"I was told that he was about to be tried by a court-martial. The division was to go forward in two days' time, and the commandant of the demi-brigade meant to try the criminal on the spot before leaving Andernach.

"While that court-martial was sitting, I was in an agony of suspense. It was noon before they brought Prosper Magnan back to prison. I was taking my prescribed exercise when he came ; he saw me, and rushed into my arms.



" 'I am lost !' he said. 'Lost beyond hope ! Every one here must look on me as a murderer——'

"Then he raised his head proudly. 'This injustice has completely given me back my innocence,' he said. 'If I had lived, my life must always have been troubled, but my death shall be without reproach. But is there anything beyond ?'

"The whole eighteenth century spoke in that sudden questioning. He was absorbed in thought.

" 'But what did you tell them ? What did they ask you ?' I cried. 'Did you not tell them the simple truth as you told it to me ?'

"He gazed at me for a minute, then after the brief, dreadful pause, he answered with a feverish readiness of speech—

" 'First of all they asked me—"Did you go out of the inn during the night ?" "Yes," I told them. "How did you get out ?" I turned red, and answered, "Through the window." "Then you must have opened it ?" "Yes," I said. "You set about it very cautiously ; the landlord heard nothing !" I was like one stupefied all the time. The boatmen swore that they had seen me walking, sometimes towards Andernach, sometimes towards the forest. I went to and fro many times, they said. I had buried the gold and diamonds. As a matter of fact, the valise has not been found. Then, the whole time, I myself was struggling against remorse. Whenever I opened my mouth to speak, a merciless voice seemed to cry, "*You meant to do it !*" Everything was against me, even myself ! They wanted to know about my comrade, and I completely exonerated *him*. Then they said, "One of you four must be guilty—you or your comrade, the innkeeper or his wife. All the doors and windows were shut fast this morning !" When they said that,' he went on, 'I had no voice, no strength, no spirit left in me. I was more sure of my friend than of myself ; I saw very well that they thought us both equally guilty of the murder, and I was the clumsier one of the two. I tried to explain the thing by somnam-

bulism ; I tried to clear my friend ; then I got muddled, and it was all over with me. I read my sentence in the judges' eyes. Incredulous smiles stole across their faces. That is all. The suspense is over. I am to be shot to-morrow—— I do not think of myself now,' he said, 'but of my poor mother.'

"He stopped short and looked up to heaven. He shed no tears ; his eyes were dry and contracted with pain.

"Frédéric !

"Ah ! I remember now ! The other one was called Frédéric—Frédéric ! Yes, I am sure that was the name," M. Hermann exclaimed triumphantly.

I felt the pressure of my fair neighbor's foot ; she made a sign to me, and looked across at M. Taillefer. The sometime army-contractor's hand drooped carelessly over his eyes, but through the fingers we thought we saw a smouldering blaze in them.

"Eh ?" she said in my ear, "and now suppose that his name is Frédéric ?"

I gave the lady a side glance of entreaty to be silent. Hermann went on with his tale.

"'It is cowardly of Frédéric to leave me to my fate. He must have been afraid. Perhaps he is hiding in the inn, for both our horses were there in the yard that morning. What an inexplicable mystery it is !' he added, after a pause. 'Somnambulism, somnambulism ! I never walked in my sleep but once in my life, and then I was not six years old. And I am to go out of this,' he went on, striking his foot against the earth, 'and take with me all the friendship that there is in the world ! Must I die twice over, doubting the friendship that began when we were five years old, and lasted through all our school-life and our student days ! Where is Frédéric ?'

"The tears filled his eyes. We cling more closely to a sentiment than to our life, it seems !

"'Let us go in again,' he said ; 'I would rather be in my

cell. I don't mean them to see me crying. I shall go bravely to my death, but I cannot play the hero in season and out of season, and I confess that I am sorry to leave my life, my fair life, and my youth. I did not sleep last night; I remembered places about my home when I was a child; I saw myself running about in the meadows, perhaps it was the memories of those fields that led to my ruin. I had a future before me' (he interrupted himself). 'A dozen men, a sub-lieutenant who will cry, "Ready! present! fire!" a roll of drums, and disgrace! that is my future now! Ah! there is a God, there is a God, or all this would be too nonsensical.'

"Then he grasped my arm, put his arms about me and held me tightly to him.

"'Ah! you are the last human soul to whom I can pour out my soul. *You* will be free again! You will see your mother! I do not know whether you are rich or poor, but no matter for that, you are all the world for me. They cannot keep the fighting up forever. Well and good then, when they make peace, go to Beauvais. If my mother survives the disastrous news of my death, you will find her out and tell her "He was innocent," to comfort her. She will believe you,' he went on. 'I shall write to her as well, but you will carry my last look to her; you shall tell her how that you were the last friend whom I embraced before I died. Ah! how she will love you, my poor mother, you who have stood my friend at the last!' He was silent for a moment or two, the burden of his memories seemed too heavy for him to bear. 'Here they are all strangers to me,' he said, 'the other surgeons and the men, and they all shrink from me in horror. But for you, my innocence must remain a secret between me and heaven.'

"I vowed to fulfill his last wishes as a sacred charge. He felt that my heart went out to him, and was touched by my words. A little later the soldiers came back to take him before the court-martial again. He was doomed.

"I know nothing of the formalities or circumstances that

attend a sentence of this kind ; I do not know whether there is any appeal, nor whether the young surgeon's defense was made according to rule and precedent, but he prepared to go to his death early on the morrow, and spent that night in writing to his mother.

" ' We shall both be set free to-day,' he said, smiling, when I went the next day to see him. ' The general has signed your pardon, I hear.' "

" I said nothing, and gazed at him to engrave his features on my memory.

" A look of loathing crossed his face, and he said, ' I have been a miserable coward ! All night long I have been praying the very walls for mercy,' and he looked round his cell. ' Yes, yes,' he went on, ' I howled with despair, I rebelled against this, I have been through the most fearful inward conflict. I was alone ! Now I am thinking of what others will say of me—Courage is like a garment that we put on. I must go decently to my death. And so——' "

## II. A DOUBLE RETRIBUTION.

" Oh ! do not tell us any more ! " cried the girl who had asked for the story, cutting short the Nuremberger. " I want to live in suspense, and to believe that he was saved. If I were to know to-night that they shot him, I should not sleep. You must tell me the rest to-morrow. "

We rose. M. Hermann offered his arm to my fair neighbor, who asked as she took it, " They shot him, did they not ? "

" Yes. I was there. "

" What, monsieur, you could—— "

" He wished it, madame. It is something very ghastly to attend the funeral of a living man, your own friend who is not guilty of the crime laid to his charge. The poor young fellow

never took his eyes off me. He seemed to have no life but mine left. 'He wished,' he said, 'that I should bear his last sigh to his mother.'"

"Well, and did you see her?"

"After the Peace of Amiens I went to France to take the glad tidings, 'He was innocent!' That pilgrimage was like a sacred duty laid upon me. But Mme. Magnan was dead, I found; she had died of consumption. I burned the letter I had brought for her, not without deep emotion. Perhaps you will laugh at my German high-flown sentimentality; but for me there was a tragedy most sublimely sad in the eternal silence which was about to swallow up those farewells uttered in vain from one grave to another grave, and heard by none, like the cry of some traveler in the desert surprised by a beast of prey."

Here I broke in with a "How if some one were to bring you face to face with one of the men in this drawing-room, and say, 'There is the murderer!' would not that be another tragedy? And what would you do?"

M. Hermann took up his hat and went.

"You are acting like a young man, and very thoughtlessly," said the lady. "Just look at Taillefer; there he sits in a low chair by the fire, Mademoiselle Fanny is handing him a cup of coffee; he is smiling. How could a murderer display such quiet self-possession as that, after a story that must have been torture to him? He looks quite patriarchal, does he not?"

"Yes; but just ask him if he has been with the army in Germany!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?" and with the audacity rarely lacking in womankind when occasion tempts or curiosity gets the better of her, my fair neighbor went across to the army-contractor.

"Have you been in Germany, M. Taillefer?" quoth she. Taillefer all but dropped his saucer.

"I, madame? No, never."

"Why, what is that your are saying, Taillefer?" protested

the banker, chiming in. "You were in the Wagram campaign, were you not—on the victualing establishment?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Taillefer; "I was there, that once."

"You are wrong about him; he is a good sort of man," decided the lady when she came back to me.

"Very well," said I to myself, "before this evening is over I will drive the murderer out of the mire in which he is hiding."

There is a phenomenon of consciousness that takes place daily beneath our eyes, so commonplace that no one notices it, and yet there are astounding depths beneath it. Two men meet in a drawing-room who have some cause to disdain or to hate each other; perhaps one of them knows something which is not to the credit of the other; perhaps it is a condition of things that is kept a secret; perhaps one of them is meditating a revenge; but both of them are conscious of the gulf that divides them, or that ought to divide them. Before they know it, they are watching each other and absorbed in each other; some subtle emanation of their thought seems to distil from every look and gesture; they have a magnetic influence. Nor can I tell which has the more power of attraction—revenge or crime, hatred or contempt. Like some priest who cannot consecrate the house where an evil spirit abides, the two are ill at ease and suspicious; one of them, it is hard to say which, is polite, and the other sullen; one of them turns pale or red, and the other trembles, and it often happens that the avenger is quite as cowardly as the victim. For very few of us have the nerve to cause pain, even if it is necessary pain, and many a man passes over a matter or forgives from sheer hatred of fuss or dread of making a tragical scene.

With this intersusceptibility of minds, and apprehensiveness of thought and feeling, there began a mysterious struggle between the army-contractor and myself. Ever since my interruption of M. Hermann's story he had shunned my eyes,

Perhaps in like manner he looked none of the party in the face. He was chatting now with the inexperienced Fanny, the banker's daughter; probably, like all criminals, he felt a longing to take shelter with innocence, as if the mere proximity of innocence might bring him peace for a while. But though I stood on the other side of the room, I still listened to all that he said; my direct gaze fascinated him. When he thought he could glance at me in turn, unnoticed, our eyes met, and his eyelids fell directly. Taillefer found this torture intolerable, and hastened to put a stop to it by betaking himself to a card-table. I backed his opponent, hoping to lose my money. It fell out as I had wished. The other player left the table, I cut in, and the guilty man and I were now face to face.

"Monsieur," I said, as he dealt the cards, "will you be so good as to begin a fresh score?" He swept his counters from right to left somewhat hastily. The lady, my neighbor at dinner, passed by; I gave her a significant glance.

"M. Frédéric Taillefer," I asked, addressing my opponent, "are you related to a family in Beauvais with whom I am well acquainted?"

"Yes, sir." He let the cards fall, turned pale, hid his face in his hands, begged one of his backers to finish the game for him, and rose.

"It is too warm here," he gasped; "I am afraid——"

He did not finish his sentence. An expression of horrible anguish suddenly crossed his face, and he hurried out of the room, the master of the house following him with what appeared to be keen anxiety. My neighbor and I looked at each other, but her face was overcast by indescribable sadness; there was a tinge of bitterness in it.

"Is your behavior very merciful?" she asked, as I rose from the card-table, where I had been playing and losing. She drew me into the embrasure of the window as she spoke. "Would you be willing to accept the power of reading all

hearts if you could have it? Why interfere with man's justice or God's? We may escape the one; we shall never escape the other. Is the prerogative of a president of a court of assize so enviable? And you have all but done the executioner's office as well——"

"After sharing and stimulating my curiosity," I said, "you are lecturing me!"

"You have made me think," she answered.

"So it is to be peace to scoundrels and woe to the unfortunate, is it? Let us down on our knees and worship gold! But shall we change the subject?" I said with a laugh. "Please look at the young lady who is just coming into the room."

"Well?"

"I met her three days ago at a ball at the Neapolitan embassy, and fell desperately in love. For pity's sake, tell me who she is. No one could tell me——"

"This is Mlle. Victorine Taillefer!"

Everything swam before my eyes; I could scarcely hear the tones of the speaker's voice.

"Her stepmother brought her home only a while ago from the convent where she has been finishing her education somewhat late.——For a long time her father would not recognize her. She comes here to-day for the first time. She is very handsome—and very rich!"

A sardonic smile went with the words. Just as she spoke, we heard loud cries that seemed to come from an adjoining room; stifled though they were, they echoed faintly through the garden.

"Is not that M. Taillefer's voice?" I asked. We both listened intently to the sounds, and fearful groans reached our ears. Just then our hostess hurried towards us and closed the window.

"Let us avoid scenes," she said to us. "If Mlle. Taillefer were to hear her father, it would be quite enough to send her into a fit of hysterics."



The banker came back to the drawing-room, looked for Victorine, and spoke a few low words in her ear. The girl sprang at once towards the door with an exclamation, and vanished. This produced a great sensation. The card-parties broke up; every one asked his neighbor what had happened. The buzz of talk grew louder, and groups were formed.

"Has M. Taillefer——?" I began.

"Killed himself?" put in my sarcastic friend. "You would wear mourning for him with a light heart, I can see."

"But what can have happened to him?"

"Poor man!" (it was the lady of the house who spoke) "he suffers from a complaint—I cannot recollect the name of it, though M. Brousson has told me about it often enough—and he has just had a seizure."

"What kind of complaint is it?" asked an examining magistrate suddenly.

"Oh, it is something dreadful," she answered; "and the doctors can do nothing for him. The agony must be terrible. Taillefer had a seizure, I remember, once, poor man, when he was staying with us in the country; I was obliged to go to a neighbor's house so as not to hear him; his shrieks are fearful; he tries to kill himself; his daughter had to have him put into a strait waistcoat and tied down to his bed. Poor man! he says there are live creatures in his head gnawing his brain; it is a horrible, sawing, shooting pain that throbs through every nerve. He suffers so fearfully with his head that he did not feel the blisters that they used to apply at one time to draw the inflammation; but M. Brousson, his present doctor, forbade this; he says that it is nervous inflammation, and puts leeches on the throat, and applies laudanum to the head; and, indeed, since they began this treatment the attacks have been less frequent; he seldom has them oftener than once a year, in the late autumn. When he gets over one of these seizures, Taillefer always says that he would rather be broken on the wheel than endure such agony again."

"That looks as if he suffered considerably!" said a stockbroker, the wit of the party.

"Oh! last year he very nearly died," the lady went on. "He went alone to his country-house on some urgent business; there was no one at hand perhaps, for he lay stiff and stark, like one dead, for twenty-two hours. They only saved his life by a scalding hot bath."

"Then is it some kind of tetanus?" asked the stockbroker.

"I do not know," returned she. "He has had the complaint nearly thirty years; it began while he was with the army. He says that he had a fall on a boat, and a splinter got into his head, but Brousson hopes to cure him. People say that in England they have found out a way of treating it with prussic acid, and that you run no risks——"

A shrill cry, louder than any of the preceding ones, rang through the house. The blood ran cold in our veins.

"There!" the banker's wife went on, "that is just what I was expecting every moment. It makes me start on my chair and creep through every nerve. But—it is an extraordinary thing!—poor Taillefer, suffering such unspeakable pain as he does, never runs any risk of his life! He eats and drinks as usual whenever he has a little respite from that ghastly torture——Nature has such strange freaks. Some German doctor once told him that it was a kind of gout in the head; and Brousson's opinion was pretty much the same."

I left the little group about our hostess and went out with Mlle. Taillefer. A servant had come for her. She was crying.

"*Oh mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" she sobbed; "how can my father have offended heaven to deserve such suffering as this? So kind as he is."

I went down stairs with her, and saw her into the carriage; her father was lying doubled up inside it. Mlle. Taillefer tried to smother the sound of her father's moaning by covering his mouth with a handkerchief. Unluckily, he saw me,

and his drawn face seemed further distorted, a scream of agony rent the air, he gave me a dreadful look, and the carriage started.

That dinner party and the evening that followed it was to exercise a painful influence on my life and on my views. Honor and my own scruples forbade me to connect myself with a murderer, no matter how good a husband and father he might be, and so I must needs fall in love with Mlle. Taillefer. It was wellnigh incredible how often chance drew me to visit at houses where I knew I might meet Victorine. Again and again, when I had pledged myself to renounce her society, the evening would find me hovering about her. The pleasures of this life were immense. It gave the color of an illicit passion to this unforbidden love, and a chimerical remorse filled up the measure of my bliss. I scorned myself when I greeted Taillefer, if by accident he was with his daughter; but, after all, I bowed to him.

Unluckily, in fact, Victorine, being something more than a pretty girl, was well read, charming, and gifted in no small degree, without being in the least a blue-stocking, without the slightest taint of affectation. There is a certain reserve in her light talk and a pensive graciousness about her that no one could resist. She liked me, or, at any rate, she allowed me to think so; there was a certain smile that she kept for me; for me the tones of her voice grew sweeter still. Oh! she cared about me, but she worshiped her father; she would praise his kindness to me, his gentleness, his various perfections, and all her praises were like so many daggers thrust into my heart.

At length I all but became an accessory after the fact, an accomplice in the crime which had laid the foundation of the wealth of the Taillefers. I was fain to ask for Victorine's hand. I fled. I traveled abroad. I went to Germany and to Andernach. But I came back again, and Victorine was

looking thinner and paler than her wont. If she had been well and in good spirits, I should have been safe ; but now the old feeling for her was rekindled with extraordinary violence.

Fearing lest my scruples were degenerating into monomania, I resolved to convene a Sanhedrim of consciences that should not have been tampered with, and so to obtain some light on this problem of the higher morality and philosophy. The question had only become more complex since my return.

So the day before yesterday I assembled those among my friends whom I looked upon as notably honest, scrupulous, and honorable. I asked two Englishmen, a secretary to the embassy and a Puritan ; a retired Minister, in the character of matured worldly wisdom ; a few young men still under the illusions of inexperience ; a priest, an elderly man ; my old guardian, a simple-hearted being, who gave me the best account of his management of my property that ever trustee has been known to give in the annals of the Palais ; an advocate, a notary, and a judge—in short, all social opinions were represented and all practical wisdom. We had begun by a good dinner, good talk, and a deal of mirth ; and over the dessert I told my story plainly and simply (suppressing the name of my lady-love), and asked for sound counsel.

“Give me your advice,” I said to my friends as I came to an end. “Go thoroughly into the question as if it were a point of law. I will have an urn and billiard balls brought round, and you shall vote for or against my marriage, the secrecy of the ballot shall be scrupulously observed.”

Deep silence prevailed all at once. Then the notary declined to act.

“There is a contract to draw up,” he alleged.

Wine had had a quieting effect on my guardian ; indeed, it clearly behooved me to find a guardian for *him* if he was to reach his home in safety.

"I see how it is!" I said to myself. "A man who does not give me an opinion is telling me pretty forcibly what I ought to do."

There was a general movement round the table. A landowner, who had subscribed to a fund for putting a headstone to General Foy's grave and providing for his family, exclaimed—

"'Even, as virtue, crime hath its degrees.'"

"The babbler," said the Minister in a low voice, as he nudged my elbow.

"Where is the difficulty?" asked a duke, whose property consisted of lands confiscated from Protestants after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

The advocate rose to his feet.

"In law," opined the mouthpiece of justice, "the case before us presents no difficulty whatever. Monsieur le Duc is right! Is there not a statute of limitations? Begin to inquire into the origins of a fortune, and where should we all of us be? This is a matter of conscience, and not of law. If you must drag the case before some tribunal, the confessional is the proper place in which to hear it."

And the Code incarnate, having said his say, sat down and drank a glass of champagne. The man intrusted with the interpretation of the Gospel, the good priest, spoke next.

"God has made us weak," he said with decision. "If you love the criminal's heiress, marry her; but content yourself with her mother's property, and give her father's money to the poor."

"Why, in all likelihood the father only made a great match because he had made money first," cried one of the pitiless quibblers that you meet with everywhere. "And it is just the same with every little bit of good fortune—it all came of his crime!"

"The fact that the matter can be discussed is enough to decide it! There are some things which a man cannot weigh

and ponder," cried my guardian, thinking to enlighten the assembly by this piece of drunken gravity.

"True!" said the secretary to the embassy.

"True!" exclaimed the priest, each meaning quite differently.

A doctrinaire, who escaped being elected by a bare hundred and fifty votes out of a hundred and fifty-five, rose next.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this phenomenal manifestation of the intellectual nature is one of the most strongly marked instances of an exception to the normal condition of things, the rules which society obeys. The decision, therefore, on an abnormal case should be an extemporaneous effort of the conscience, a sudden conception, a delicate discrimination of the inner consciousness, not unlike the flashes of insight that constitute perception in matters of taste. Let us put it to the vote."

"Yes, let us put it to the vote," cried the rest of the party.

Each was provided with two billiard-balls—one white, the other red. White, the color of virginity, was to proscribe marriage; red to count in favor of it. My scruples prevented me from voting. My friends being seventeen in number, nine made a decisive majority. We grew excited and curious as each dropped his ball into the narrow-mouthed wicker basket, which holds the numbered balls when players draw for their places at pool, for there was a certain novelty in this process of voting by ballot on a nice point of conduct. When the basket was turned out there were nine white balls. To me this did not come as a surprise; but it occurred to me to count up the young men of my own age among this court of appeal. There were exactly nine of these casuists; one thought had been in all their minds.

"Aha!" I said to myself, "there was a unanimous feeling against the marriage in their minds, and a no less unanimous verdict in favor of it among the rest! Here is a fix, and how am I to get out of it?"

"Where does the father-in-law live?" one of my school-fellows, less crafty and far-sighted than the rest, carelessly asked.

"There is no longer a father-in-law in the case!" I exclaimed. "A while ago my conscience spoke sufficiently plain to make your verdict superfluous. And if it speaks more uncertainly to-day, here are the inducements that led me to waver. Here is the tempter—this letter that I received two months ago; and I drew a card from my pocket-book and held it up:

*"'You are requested to be present,' so it ran, 'at the funeral and burial service of*

M. JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC TAILLEFER,

*of the firm of Taillefer and Company, sometime contractor of provisions to the Army, late Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and of the Order of the Golden Spur, Captain of the First Company of Grenadiers of the National Guard, Paris: who died on May 1st, at his house in the Rue Joubert. The interment will take place," and so forth, and so forth. 'On behalf of,' and so forth.*

"What am I to do now?" I continued. "I will just put the question roughly before you. There is unquestionably a pool of blood on Mademoiselle Taillefer's estates. Her father's property is one vast abattoir. Granted! But, then, Prosper Magnan has no representatives, and I could not find any traces of the family of the pin-maker who was murdered that night at Andernach. To whom should the fortune be returned? And ought it all to be returned? Have I any right to betray a secret discovered by accident, to add a severed human head to an innocent girl's marriage portion, to give her ugly dreams,

to destroy her pleasant illusions, to kill the father she loved a second time, by telling her that there is a dark stain on all her wealth?

"I have borrowed a 'Dictionary of Cases of Conscience' from an old ecclesiastic, and found therein no solution whatever of my doubts. Can you make a religious foundation for the souls of Prosper Magnan and Walhenfer and Taillefer now midway through this nineteenth century of ours? And as for endowing a charitable institution or awarding periodic prizes to virtue—most of our charitable institutions appear to me to be harboring scoundrels, and the prize of virtue would fall to the greatest rogues.

"And not only so. Would these investments, more or less gratifying to vanity, be any reparation? And is it my place to make any? Then I am in love, passionately in love. My love has come to be my life. If, without any apparent reason, I propose that a young girl, accustomed to splendor and elegance, and a life abundant in all the luxuries art can devise, a girl who indolently enjoys Rossini's music at the Bouffons—if to her I should propose that she should rob herself of fifteen hundred thousand francs for the benefit of aged imbeciles and problematical scrofula patients, she would laugh and turn her back upon me, or her confidante would take me for a wag who makes jokes in poor taste. If in an ecstasy of love I extol the charms of humble life in a cottage by the Loire, if I ask her to give up, for my sake, her life in Paris, it would be a virtuous lie to begin with, and probably would end in a sad experience for me, for I shall lose the girl's heart; she is passionately fond of dancing and of pretty dresses, and for the time being, of me. Enter some smart stripling of an officer with a nicely-curled mustache, who shall play the piano, rave about Byron, and mount a horse gracefully, and I shall be supplanted. What is to be done? Gentlemen, advise me, for pity's sake!"

Then one of the party, who hitherto had not breathed a



word, the Englishman with a Puritanical cast of face, not unlike the father of Jeanie Deans, shrugged his shoulders.

"Idiot that you were," he said. "What made you ask him if he came from Beauvais?"

PARIS, *May*, 1831.

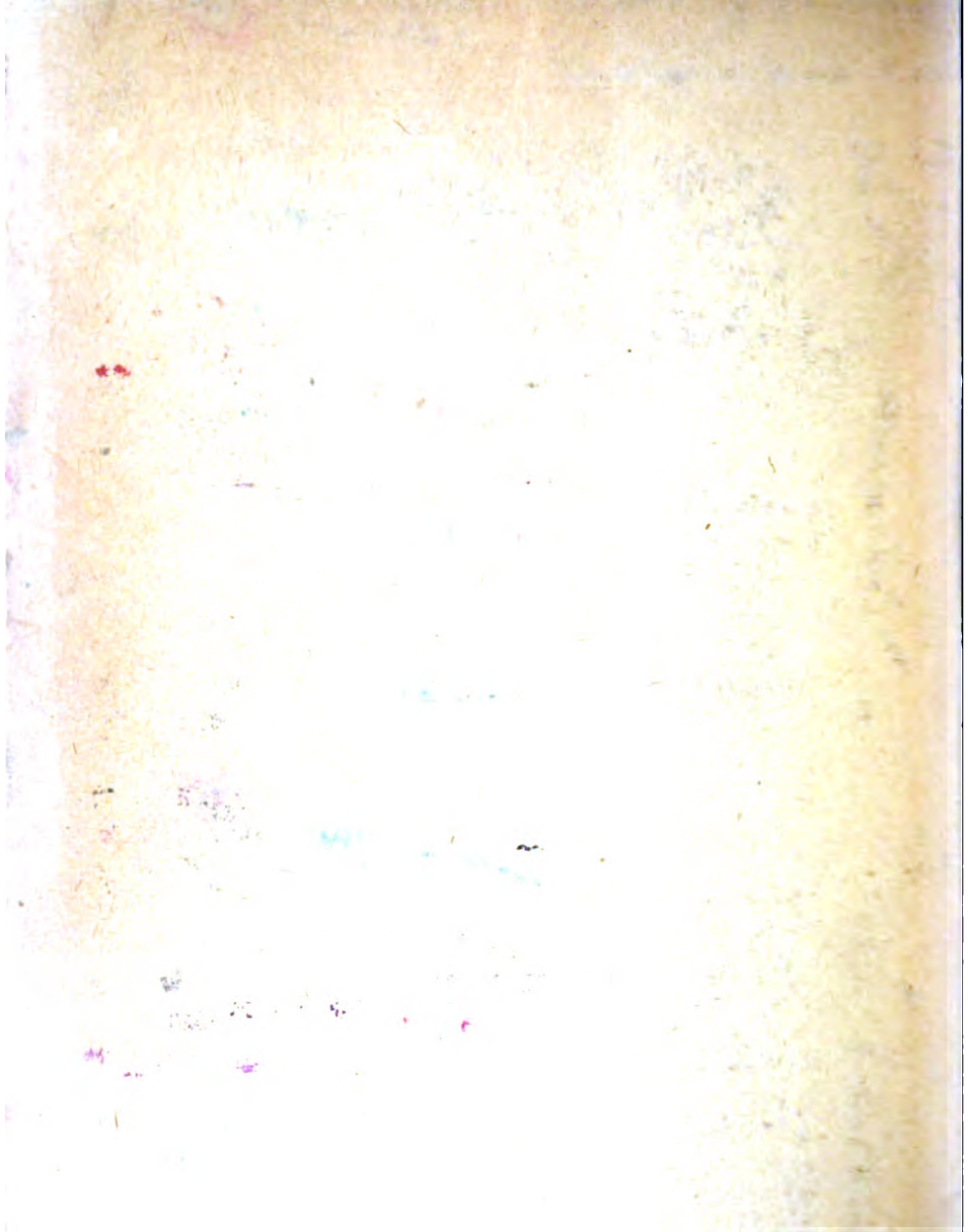


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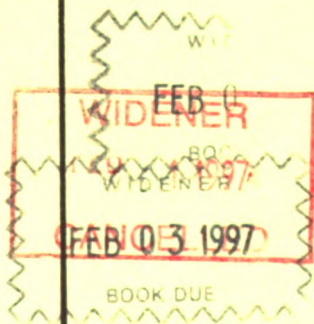
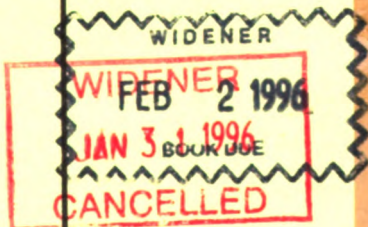






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